

A FRAMEWORK OF EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN
OF COLOR AND THE UNITED
METHODIST CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

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This ministry project established that educated and trained women of color in self-empowerment can reach their fully empowered potentials when provided the necessary tools and skillset. They embraced self-awareness thereby identifying the confidence that lives inside of them. The competencies gained provided opportunities to understand the value of womanhood and its remarkable contributions to society. They are prepared to seek leadership roles in churches, workplace, educational environments, and beyond. They set a foundation for valuing women of color and are excited to bring Christian love and determination to significantly impact lives of women of color and society through God's power.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family, who has stood beside me through this entire process, the Richards and Anthony family, who have listened, prayed, offered guidance and insight. I am immensely grateful. To my sisterhood that covered me in prayers and support.

My Professional Associates: Dr. Linda Settles, Dr. Shauntae White, Dr. Jacqui King, Dr. Starita Ansari, and Dr. Elijah Stansell Jr. who gave their time and talent to encourage, motivate, and provide support in this educational journey. My Contextual Associates: Norma McKelvy, Rev. Jackie McCall, Judge Lisa Hardwick, Bernie Winston, Monique Jones, Phyllis Harris, Anita Maltbia, Gary Maltbia, Pat Frye, and Leonard Frye. Empowerment Zone Team: Faith Anthony, Dr. Bonnye Anthony, Linda Richards, Monique Banks, Arlivia Gamble, Deaconess Garlinda Burton, Rev. Lia McIntosh, Vanessa Smith, Teresa Smith, and Pastor Juanita Rasmus. My Spiritual Mentor: Rev. Enid Henderson prayed for and with me. Rev. David F Richards III and Rev. Jessica James for laying the foundation.

The Fab 5 Cohorts: Rev. Marcus Dudley (peer Associate), Rev. Victor Demond Tate, Rev. Joyce Hoile, and Rev. Adebowale Onabanjo “Debo,” who has been my rock during every phase of the process. From monthly Zoom meetings and phone calls of one-on-one encouragement. The Rooted Cohorts mentors Dr. Rudy Rasmus, Dr. Vance P Ross, and Dr. Lillian Smith for seeing the gifts and talents given by God. You each, in

your way, poured into me what was needed steering me in the right direction. Thanks to Faculty Advisor Dr. Joni Sancken for wisdom and encouragement.

DEDICATION

This body of work is dedicated to my parents, the late retired CW4 David Forest Richards Jr. and Swannie Helmeta Virginia Moore Richards, for their unconditional love and support throughout my life. I miss you daily and thank you for seeing the best in me and making sure I knew it.

ABBREVIATIONS

AKA	Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
BMCR	Black Methodist for Church Renewal, Inc.
NOK	Neighborhood of Knowledge
UMW	United Methodist Women

Life is a hard battle anyway. If we laugh and sing a little as we fight the good fight of freedom, it makes it all go easier. I will not allow my life's light to be determined by the darkness around me.

—Sojourner Truth

You may shoot me with your words, you may cut me with your eyes, you may kill me with your hatefulness, but still, like air, I'll rise!

—Maya Angelou

INTRODUCTION

St. James United Methodist Church (UMC) and United Methodist Women through the year's vision and mission statement displays the urgency of an individual's intentional engagement and community involvement surrounding the concern for social justice, women's empowerment, ministry of the poor and the community of the least, the lost and forgotten. In completing this project, a model of development was created to equip and educate women in leadership to increase and fulfill the mission of the local church to transform the world. We will fully engage women in the life of kingdom building through empowerment movement while using community action, engagement, and leadership opportunities. Micah 6:6-8 reminds us of our charge and assignment from Christ:

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.¹

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us that

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have never yet engaged in a direct-action movement that was "well-timed," according to the timetable for those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now, I have heard the words "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." It has

¹ Biblical citations are from the New International Version unless otherwise stated, Micah 6:6-8.

been a tranquilizing thalidomide, relieving the emotional stress for a moment, only to give birth to an ill-formed infant of frustration. We must come to see with the distinguished jurist of yesterday that “justice too long delayed is justice denied.”²

Let us not forget that the legendary Mahalia Jackson, an African American civil rights leader in her own right, changed the trajectory of the now-famous speech “I Have a Dream.” From her opportunity to have a seat where the decisions are made with this giant of a man—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—she knew the foundation for which he stood and where his heart was.

Furthermore, after a pause in his speech, Mahalia Jackson called out to tell her friend Martin to tell them about the dream. Moreover, the “I Have a Dream” speech catapulted in society as one of the greatest speeches ever presented from that moment forward. As women of color, we will continue to call out during the movement, reminding them of their dream through this project, which encouraged and empowered women to live their dream.

Chapter one provides a ministry overview that will explain and highlight my assignment from God on my life’s ministry journey. This chapter will explore my spiritual, historical, demographic, and educational foundation that have brought me to this point in life. I will share the vision for my theme and the hypothesis for the project.

Chapter two discusses Matthew 25:31-46 and provides guidance on how to hold on to God’s unchanging hand and our assignments on life’s journey of helping others. Keeping one’s eyes on God at all times, no matter the situation, assures us that we can achieve everything we want to accomplish, we can raise every low valley, and we can

² Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2006), 292.

overcome every doubt. Often, people will say how one lives out the words of the scripture. We must never be ashamed of God and honor God regardless of what others say. Being a strong woman of color requires staying solid in her faithfulness to God and continuing to believe in God's powerful words of knowing God would protect one and all.

Chapter three explores the many ways that the United Methodist Women organization contributed to the uplifting of African American women and community for more than 150 years. United Methodist Women's dedication to social justice and racial justice is historical, as evidenced by the groundbreaking landmark decision of Brown vs. Board of Education that affected education across the nation. We explored the ability to provide leadership training for all girls, youth, and women both nationally and globally.

Chapter four explores the beloved community's different influences that will allow for gleaned knowledge and power from the struggles and challenges of those who live with battle scars both seen and unseen. The church will build relationships through their engagement opportunities and partnerships while focusing on community connection and mission for uplift and social justice. This chapter will engage Womanist Theology, which will provide an infusion of courageous and bold women willing to fight through the struggle thereby making a difference in the lives of women who were neglected and left out of opportunities to serve God's children.

Chapter five engages the importance of discussing our differences and similarities, including the role of power in defining who we are and what we are allowed to do, which leads to wonderfully new, exciting, and richly resourced faith communities that will attract people who previously gave the church a wide berth. Creating new

communities will enable us to engage in effective ministries of justice, compassion, and reconciliation for women of color in celebrating their strengths.

Chapter six seeks to highlight the project analysis from the perspective of methodology, implementation, and summary of learning. This chapter highlights the giftedness of women trained as Christian leaders. God created each person uniquely with gifts and purposes. Dr. Rudy Rasmus rightly explains that

We must recognize that God not only made each of us unique, but He had a specific design and plan in making us. God never seeks to wipe out our differences; rather, He calls us to champion our difference, unite our hearts and then use our individual God-given talents and abilities in collaborative ways to solve problems and create solutions- even to problems we have not yet identified or defined.³

We celebrate the accomplishments and move forward in empowering women of color, leading to more significant impact in local church ministry and the United Methodist Church.

³ Rudy Rasmus, *Love Period: When All Else Fails* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2014), 19.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

We as Christians are called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the broken world. Jesus said in Mathew 26:11, “the poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me” (Mt. 26:11). Jesus says that one must find ways to take care of the least, the lost, and forgotten. Rev. Emanuel Cleaver, II shared in 1992 that “There is more to being a Christian than sitting in the pews,” and Dr. Emanuel Cleaver, III shared that we are to connect people to God in practical ways. We must be willing to establish a relationship. We often learn from people; some are ignorant as to how to build a positive and productive relationship, sometimes making mistakes.

In an article titled “Why Many Welcoming Churches are Dying Churches” by Joseph Yoo, he shares “That’s the second mistake many of us make. Not only do we assume that a majority of our neighbors know about the church, but we also look at outreach through the lens of the question ‘How do we get people into our pews’ rather than actually being missional.”¹ Understanding these words of wisdom from the senior pastors and Jesus’ words caused me to seek a greater understanding and solution to the decrease of members involved in the church’s ministries. We will explore the many ways

¹ Joseph Yoo, “Why Many Welcoming Churches Are Dying Churches,” Ministry Matters, December 31, 2015, <https://www.ministrymatters.com>.

of engagement of laity into the life of kingdom building through the Social Justice Movement, through community action, community engagement by networking, partnership, collaboration, and context. Psalm twenty-five states:

In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause. Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. Remember, Lord, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old. Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways; according to your love remember me, for you, Lord, are good. Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways. He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. All the ways of the Lord are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant (Ps. 25).

Rev. Emanuel Cleaver, II was deeply rooted in the Civil Rights Movement through building relationships with individuals thereby shaping his visions and mission for the work of injustice for others. Rev. Cleaver, II respected the following influential pastors: Phil Lawson, Jim Lawson, Ralph Abernathy, Joseph Lowery, and his mentor Fred Shuttlesworth. These giants in the Christian community left a footprint to follow from sharing their journey of walking with Christ to being difference-makers in the community. The ability to share those essential skills and talents required in community engagement and involvement will be instrumental to retaining members. These men were instrumental in creating a platform for ministry to reach people in the community and city. They wanted to make a statement for better lives and provide opportunities for others by dealing with the racial justice and divide created in the city, community, and church.

The explanation from Anita Farber-Robertson clearly shows the importance of sharing, as she writes that “An institution that learns how to learn will always be relevant,

always be vibrant and always be hospitable to the movement of the spirit. Such a religious institution will cultivate and nurture people of God who are not frozen, not brittle, not stuck, but constantly growing in faith.”² Growing in faith is a critical connection in building a membership of people who know that God is always on their side and never leaves them in this journey.

Dr. Emanuel Cleaver, III’s vision and mission of the St. James UMC is having faith in action by addressing the community’s needs. His beliefs are connecting people with their faith, those who want to be honest, building a relationship with God, and not just on Sunday. He looks for ministry settings to build relationships in the faith community, not simply places for resources but places where people care about individuals. Dr. Emanuel Cleaver, III’s interview reflects what was shared in the book journey, and he explains, “The power of reconciliation comes from God. The human world, in its self-centeredness, is separated from God. In our human relations, we are torn apart by violence, hatred, retribution, and apathy. How do we restore the relationship with God and with our neighbors?”³

St. James UMC is in the urban core of Kansas City, Missouri. We are currently a drive-in church where over ninety percent of the membership drive in for worship services. As a member since 1986, there is a stigma attached to the church as an upper-class membership with members driving the luxury vehicles and persons appearing to dress for a fashion show on Sunday with the latest designers. Most people might perceive

² Anita Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading Increasing Your Effectiveness in Ministry* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2000), 116.

³ Stephanie Hixon Porter and Thomas Porter, *The Journey* (New York, NY: United Methodist Women, 2011), 59.

that negatively. In *Beyond the Box*, authors Easum and Travis share the importance of innovative churches that work, writing that

Most North Americans now live in more urban locations. Our cities have become highly stratified, complex networks of relationships. Although a group of people may be living within the same community, many layers of racial, ethnic, economic, educational, and lifestyle differences tend to keep them separated. It is impossible to know everyone anymore. As a result, our communities are not likely to be changed by any single congregation or leader. Instead, they will change only as God's people band together, not around a common table but around the common mission of being the body of Christ in every corner of our communities. We believe we are seeing the first fruit of such a body. And it has been given a name: church in a city.⁴

We were taught to give Jesus the absolute best, including in our attire and giving of time, talents, and gifts. Current attendance on Sunday is over 1000 persons including those who attend three worship services in person and online. We also provide Tuesday Bible study at the Renaissance campus and Wednesday night Bible study in which both locations provide childcare for approximately 100 persons. The membership consists of a higher level of educated individuals, including high level educators. The increase in membership came from the partnership between Rev. Emanuel Cleaver, II and the band instructor from Southwest High School, who needed a location to practice. This relationship assisted St. James UMC in building a powerful choir.

St. James UMC is a predominately African American Church with an age range for members between forty-five and sixty-five years old. We have many children, which means a church is growing. St. James UMC is a family church where several families have been members for over twenty-five years. We are blessed to have members in their 80's and 90's who attend worship celebrations and Bible study. We have many members

⁴ Bill Travis and Dave Easum, *Beyond the Box Innovative Churches that Work* (Loveland, CO: Loveland Group, 2003), 69.

who attended a Historical Black College or University (HBCU). Moreover, they are active members of one of the nine Black sororities and fraternities, which provide community service and promotion for higher education options.

Ministry Journey

After graduating from the best university for me, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (NC A and T) in Greensboro, North Carolina, I learned to be a leader and spoke out. From the very beginning, leadership followed from freshman year, being a part of the Student Government Association. North Carolina A and T demonstrated how to march for injustice and take pride in my heritage. As a military dependent, in the first years of grade school, I was the only female individual of color in class, and this was an experience to see that greatness comes in all shapes, sizes, and colors. I gained independence and became a vessel for God to use in helping and healing others.

My newfound leadership growth excelled since resigning from State Farm Insurance Company. I enrolled in the John Maxwell Team for leadership, attended workshops, and was certified as a team member for coaching, mentoring, training, and leadership workshops. As a proud member of the first Black sorority—Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.—since fall 1988, I had an opportunity to further my passion for service to all humankind as part of this organization that provides community services. I was proud to be a graduate advisor at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas, as it allowed me to embrace and share my love for the sisterhood. There, I had the chance to gain an opportunity for leadership and the ability to work with young ladies in providing

leadership and educational skills. Through the years of service, I was to be a part of the regional conference in serving as the chair of the Awards Committee, which allowed me to be seen as a leader by our regional directors. I was finally asked to be a workshop presenter at our National Leadership Seminar after engaging in community service through many years. A turning point in my recognition from the leadership was being asked to present at the Engagement in Community Service workshop at our national meeting of the Boule. While it was an honor, I could not attend because of my board meeting at World Methodist Council in Seoul, Korea.

The regional director of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. for the Mid-Western Region asked me to serve on the Spiritual Oversight Committee, which led to being the worship speaker for our Mid-Western Region Conference. This opportunity was God's way of saying "I see you, Yvette, and now others will see what I instilled in you." One of the individuals in the sorority that was a negative sister witnessed firsthand God's handiwork. I stood proudly before my sisters in Christ, my sorority members who accepted my message and provided loving and caring responses. I have been a member for over thirty years, leading the way in community service. Then, on May 18, 2019, blessings flowed while graduating from United Theology Seminary with a degree of Master of Arts in Christian Ministry before becoming a first-semester doctoral student in The Rooted Cohort.

My career with State Farm Insurance lasted twenty-eight years. This career showed my love of serving, helping, and fighting for people. Handling claims was not just about the payout or salary. When one can impact a person's life, that makes all the difference in the world. Being single, some thought it was odd that I was asked to head

up the children's Easter and Christmas events. People knew I was a Brownie leader at my church and would have enjoyable activities in which the children could participate. The Easter and Christmas children's events turned into crafts, games, and party events. It became a family event in which I became the babysitter for many of my co-worker's children. They knew I would add a spiritual theme, which they did not mind and embraced. My desire to give and please was taken to new heights when asked to participate in the job fairs for my company as I was a claim representative, but the human resources manager loved my excitement and passion for attracting other positive people for our community.

Throughout my Catastrophe Services career, which allowed one to handle auto and homeowners claims for our policyholders that are impacted by hailstorms, floods, the weight of ice and snow, and significant disasters such as hurricanes since 1999, it was customary to request opportunities to leave the city and community in better shape. Contacting the local community to see what agencies or organizations could benefit from community service opportunities. One of the favorites was providing toiletry items available for the Houston, Texas Ronald McDonald House. The request went out to the staff, asking if they would donate their toiletry items from hotel bathrooms. The Ronald McDonald House used these items to make care packages for the family members that arrive daily from their local hospitals with just the clothes on their backs. To get my team members to engage, soap purchases were provided in exchange for the mini travel items. We did the collection for a month, and it was presented to the Ronald McDonald House with great appreciation. Showing staff and management how a difference could be made

was first met with resistance, but it was heartwarming after seeing individuals engage and being willing to make a difference.

The ultimate invitation came when asked to volunteer for the new African American marketing event entitled “The State Farm Bayou Classic,” held every Thanksgiving weekend in New Orleans, Louisiana involving two HBCUs. I was so excited to be selected as one of my office’s committee leads, and I supported Kevin when he was newly hired. I paid for my flight, but the hotel and meals were covered along with the game tickets. The chairperson and leadership team were so impressed that they asked me back again next year, but I was ignorant of this because they gave my letter to a friend who never shared it. The new coordinator called me to see if the coordinator or members of the team offended me. After a long conversation, I explained that the request to be on the team never arrived by the individual responsible for delivering the message to be on the State Farm Bayou Classic team.

Once knowing what occurred, Thelma sent my team managers my invitation to participate to assure them I was needed and wanted. My parents always taught us to give 1000% as God will bless us. Well, God showed up and showed out that following year. I volunteered for two events, which turned into eight hours one day and six hours the next day. They not only asked me to serve on the committee, but I received an award for my selflessness and dedication. I served two years on the committee, and when a leadership position opened, I was recommended to chair. This committee handled all the executives for State Farm, which included approximately twenty-five leaders along with their spouses, children, and the community engagement event.

While serving on the State Farm Bayou Classic Team, leadership allowed me to create, trademark, and register The Neighborhood of Knowledge (NOK). The NOK, as it was affectionally called, was created for the children of the employees and surrounding communities in New Orleans to participate in the educational programs from State Farm Insurance Company. The event included child authors, a national program for reading, literacy matters, financial literacy for children, technology one-on-one, State Farm Safety programs on seat belts, bike rodeo, helmet safety, and dental hygiene awareness.

After Hurricane Katrina devastated the New Orleans area, we partnered with KaBOOM organizations to build a state-of-the-art playground with multiple structures in one day. The KaBOOM project was completed in two phases. The first meeting took place six months prior to the event meeting with students and staff to design their ideal playground. The second phase was getting the city agencies and organizations to donate and volunteer their services. We coordinated with local community partners and collaborated in the joint effort. Friday morning, the day after Thanksgiving from 2006 to 2012 starting at 7:00 a.m., we would greet close to 250 volunteers who started at 9:00 a.m., and by 2:00 p.m. we would all say KaBOOM as the playground was completed. Recruiting 250 volunteers over the Thanksgiving holiday to travel to New Orleans was no easy task but showing the volunteers appreciation and providing a cause for a needed change was overwhelming. We created six playgrounds giving hope to the lives of children and providing a sense of hope to a community. The only compensation to the volunteers was a ticket to the State Farm Bayou Classic game. When you consider airline tickets, hotel costs, and food, this group of volunteers came with a heart of compassion and a willing spirit.

Participating in this event was a significant opportunity as I was a claim representative, and the other leaders were all in upper management. We must not permit other individuals to define us as leaders if God calls you to serve in that capacity. In *The Vile Practices of Church Leadership: Finance and Administration*, Nate Berneking shares that

As our leadership in the local church depends on our ability to be generous with the people and ministries, so our ability to lead in the greater community depends on generosity expressed to that community. I don't mean to suggest that generosity in the outside community ought to be thought of as a means to an end. We don't express generosity to the greater community in order to Christianize the masses, though without it, we will never make such inroads. Rather, it seems to me that the call of all Christians, the commission of disciples, is to live in the world, living out the self-sacrifice modeled by Christ, not just to our congregations, but to everyone, regardless of who they might be. If the mark of a Christian life is selfless love, that mark ought to be apparent to any and everyone we meet.⁵

This was God telling me “I will use your gifts and skills, not your title.” As the years continued, becoming closer to God was essential. “God, what is it you want me to do?” is the question I asked. One of the most amazing blessings was joining the most fantastic group of women called The United Methodist Women, better known as UMW. The United Methodist Women organization in 1987 had a million-plus women whose purpose just fit in my spirit. To know our purpose speaks volumes of who we are and our love of God. Regarding our purpose, “The organized unit of United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ; to develop a creative, supportive fellowship; and to

⁵ Nate Berneking, *The Vile Practices of Church Leadership: Finance and Administration* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), 15.

expand concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.”⁶

“Wow God, you have aligned me with an organization where I can do your work and be your hands and feet” was the sentiment I had. I was overjoyed and attended our different events offered from the School of Christian Mission, spiritual growth retreats, forty and under retreats, conferences, and workshops.

Amazingly, God had women coming together to learn about God and how to do kingdom-building work. Social justice and awareness were vital in dedicating my passion for God through this organization. This organization saved my life and assured me that God is in the blessing business and has a plan for my life. My assignment was in place; I just had to accept the opportunity to be bold, faithful, and loving so others would see God’s goodness.

St. James UMC gave me the foundation of God’s love to withstand anything that came my way. Philippians 4:4-7 states

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:4-7).

In a Bible study taught by Rev. Emanuel Cleaver, II, it was said that when you come up against opposition, use the Word. I found out the Word is Scripture or the Bible. When evil tried to attack me, I used the Word as a way of protection. People could not figure out what I did or why, but I lined my cubicle with scriptures, and God surrounded me with daily comfort, knowing I was not alone. As the song says, “he walks with me, and he talks to me, and tells me I am not alone.” I listened to gospel music such as James

⁶ United Methodist Women, “The Purpose of the United Methodist Women,” United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/purpose>.

Cleveland's "This Too Shall Pass" and Yolanda Adams' "This Battle Is Not Yours, It's the Lord's." One thing I cherish from the lessons of my grandmother was to always listen to all the songs and never skip a verse. The words tell a story and have a meaning. The power of those songs would give me the spiritual energy to battle the evilness.

From 1999 to 2015, I overdid everything for State Farm Catastrophe Services, with a willingness to arrive early, stay late, and go above and beyond, but it was never enough; I was not whom they wanted in the end. They wanted me to train the new employees for the last three years but felt that I was not a role model or a leader. When you hear that and fail to act, God will make a decisive move. I was prepared to tell my manager a few words, but God told me to say, "Thank you," and I shared that God told me to say, "I am already a leader, as God has made me the head and not the tail" before hanging up.

From that day forward, I failed look back, and God just opened my life to incredible blessings. In *Love. Period. When All Else Fails*, Dr. Rudy Rasmus shares that

We must recognize that God not only made each of us unique, but He had a specific design and plan in making us. God never seeks to wipe out our differences; rather, He calls us to champion our difference, unite our hearts and then use our individual God-given talents and abilities in collaborative ways to solve problems and create solutions, even to problems we have not yet identified or defined.⁷

Two weeks later, God performed a miracle, and I was elected the National President of the United Methodist Women—the leader of 800,000 women in the United States in 2012. Jesus, what are you trying to do? In 2008, I was elected a Woman Division director and could not attend the orientation meeting because my manager would not approve my vacation time—the first time in my career that vacation was denied. Consequently my

⁷ Rudy Rasmus, *Love. Period. When All Else Fails* (Nashville, TN: Worthy, 2014), 19.

feelings were hurt, and it was devastating. However, God showed me how to handle this in a kind and loving way. Tears of joy flooded my soul after knowing that the God I serve and love would bestow this incredible honor upon me; allowing me to serve at this magnitude was just mind-blowing. God always told me that God made me for greatness, but to represent this organization at its highest level was such a spiritual high that I just could not come down from it. Anytime I doubt myself, I am reminded of these words: what God has for you is for you!

The journey of being the National President of UMW allowed me to travel the world to serve God. From speaking out against injustice to women in Busan, Korea at the World Council, after being on the bus tour all day and visiting four areas where injustice against women occurred, I offered the women an opportunity to gather the next day to write a petition regarding women's rights and gender justice. They agreed to meet, and it was a glorious sight, as twenty-five of the women came together from different backgrounds and denominations to make a bold move on the spot. I was overjoyed and honored to be selected as the leader for this fantastic group of women. We did something that required the hand of God to align everything for the petition to be presented to the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. I delivered the petition that included over 150 signatures by hand with a conversation. From these petitions presented to the World Council of Churches, a gender committee was created from our work. I was overjoyed and sad because I was not allowed to be the representative from the UMW to serve.

The Bishop in North Katanga arranged for a meeting with African women leaders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo on how to be bold, confident or speaking out at

our United Nations Commission on Women against a man who spoke against the woman being comfort women denial of those women who were used as sex slaves for the Korean military. When thinking of the blessing of being the National President of United Methodist Women, my spirit and soul was so full, I prayed it would spill over to everyone I encountered.

In speaking with my daddy, I shared that I wanted to make the most significant impact on our organization. He asked, “what are your passions and your favorite things?” Through prayer, it came to me to visit all our ninety-seven National Mission Institutions, of which were six colleges. Our National Mission Institution comprises community service agencies and organizations that provide anything from housing for seniors, ages out of foster care, after school tutoring, housing for domestic violence victims, homeless, daycare for children and seniors, English as a second language, food pantry, and a favorite a camp for children with special needs to name a few. They provide programs, workshops, and projects in ways of helping others to achieve in life.

The journey began, and it was on the road, and through the air, I began visiting the National Mission Institutions and United Methodist Women units and conferences across the USA. I went from Susanna Wesley Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, to Wesley Center in Savannah, Georgia; from Emma Norton Women’s Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Huston Tillson College in Austin, Texas. I was excited to visit forty-eight of the National Mission Institutions and four colleges, which allowed me to engage in conversations, hands-on mission opportunities, and sharing ways to partner, network, and collaborate with individuals and communities. This enabled me to build a relationship in every jurisdiction of the United Methodist Women and the United Methodist Church.

Serving on the General Agencies Boards of the United Methodist Church provides various opportunities to network and collaborate.

Serving on the General Board of Global Ministries provided first-hand experience on programs that made an immediate impact on communities. The General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, Global Aids Fund, and Black Methodist for Church Renewal are agencies that ensure awareness and accountability for those sometimes without a voice. Being at the table allowed me to point out injustices and wrongs that needed addressing. I was a voice for the least, the lost, and forgotten.

On April 3, 2017, a blessed opportunity was fulfilled in starting as the Director of Community Connections and Social Media for St. James UMC in Kansas City, Missouri, under the leadership of Dr. Emanuel Cleaver, III. This position was created to engage St. James UMC members and surrounding communities. St. James UMC resides in the Blue Hills Neighborhood Association. Meeting with their leadership and attending monthly neighborhood captains resulted in building a relationship, establishing a strong bond, and a willingness to collaborate. We met and decided on a seven-week community-wide clean-up ending with a back-to-school supplies give-a-way, including the police department. We invited our neighborhood schools and encouraged the community to engage and network for future events. Being a part of the Blue Hills Neighborhood Association allowed us to engage with over 500 homes and families, keeping them informed in our activities, events, and projects they were all welcomed and encouraged to attend.

My faith was built by watching how God blessed our families richly with love, compassion, caring, and giving hearts. After the entire family returned home to Stone

Mountain and Durham, North Carolina, it was just daddy and me. I was ready to watch the Super Bowl. My daddy turned to me and asked, “is everyone gone?” I replied “Yes, it is just us twins.” He said “okay, I am ready,” to which I responded “Okay, let us watch some football.” He then said “No Yvette, I am ready! Put me to bed, my head is strong, but my flesh is weak. It is time.” Oh, Lord! I began to hyperventilate. Then a feeling of peace and calmness came over me. I said “alright, daddy,” but when I went to help get him up, his legs gave out, and he arched his back in an awful scream of pain. God gave me the strength to move my daddy into the wheelchair and then lift him to his bed for the last time. There were crocodile tears, just flowing all while saying God help me. The honor to be the one to prepare my father to be called home is something that I will cherish for the rest of my life. Deuteronomy 5:16 states, “Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that your days may be extended and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you” (Dt. 5:16). The Deuteronomy scripture kept rolling around in my head.

God said I would never leave you. I believed that. With daddy, it was different, as I witnessed his decline and pain in a way that clearly explained what God did. We selected the peaceful passing from hospice, which was my task to follow. I can say, God is a healer. I prayed for God to come and relieve daddy of the pain, allowing this great man, husband, and father to walk around heaven living in his mansion. As I held my Pookie Bear’s hand and said, “Thank you, Pookie Bear. Well done, my good and faithful servant, no hill for a stepper and I will be okay,” my anchor took his last breath. My daddy shared that no hill for a stepper means there is no obstacle we cannot overcome with God on our side.

Within seventy-nine days, both my beloved caring and nurturing systems were gone. I was and still am broken today. However, knowing that I serve a wonderful, caring, and loving God, I completed my studies and graduated on May 18, 2019, and entered the Doctoral of Ministry program. People asked where my strength comes from; I say the Lord. Nothing but the Lord. I am blessed with a brother, sister, and family who lift me daily. We are stronger, wiser, and bolder in our faith. I am living in a new world of not letting small things distract me, as if I can make it through losing my rocks and being an example of strength for others. We often laugh that we uplifted the city of Savannah as they were broken, which shows our parents' love and commitment. God is ever-present in our time of trouble, but God teaches us something new. God's timing is not for us to question but to learn to cherish God's blessings from above. I shed crocodile tears with joy, more so now in knowing that I was given the precious gift of having two loving and amazing parents. My journey continues to strive for excellence in everything.

The God I serve showed me that God could take this little dyslexic young lady who was afraid to read in public because of the words appearing mixed up, and have her to stand before leaders of all the nations. I offered words of encouragement, inspiration and motivation for others to be a part of the building of God's kingdom; it is because of my friend Mary Magdalene, who said it best. "He is Alive." Lord, I thank you, Lord, I am grateful, and Lord, I am just a humble servant.

Develop the Synergy

Understanding the dynamics of members' involvement, and how the decrease was essential to get first-hand information from those that were members from sixty years to

current regarding our ministry involvement is important. In *Funding Ministry with Five Loaves and Two Fishes*, Rosario Picardo shares that “Many Urban churches find themselves in situations where it becomes difficult to reach out to their community because of financial barriers. However, when they are willing to work together, churches are enabled to give expansively to their communities.”⁸ Some studies show that getting feedback from your project allows you the ability to know the positive and negative gains from the event. Often, individuals only look at the negative results and might believe the event was a failure, so reviewing all materials and data collected can be beneficial. In planning a project or an event, success comes from reviewing the evaluations. One thing that is important to see regarding any project or event is an effective evaluation. We learn that the focus can be determined from completing an evaluation. Cahalan writes that

There are many ways in which evaluation facilitates learning and collaboration among the project’s stakeholders. The purpose of the evaluation is a statement about its overall intent and function in relations to the evaluation’s subject and audiences. An evaluation can do one or more of the following; describe and assess the quality and effectiveness of project activities and results; determine what objectives have been met in relationship to project goals; suggest improvements in activities and resources; understand the project’s impact on constituents; and analyze the project’s overall strategy.⁹

Purpose of Evaluation

- Describe the quality and effectiveness of activities, resources, and results.
- Identify how well objectives are being or have been achieved.
- Improve activities and resources.

⁸ Rosario Picardo and Mike Slaughter, *Funding Ministry with Five Loaves and Two Fishes* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2016), 65-66.

⁹ Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Projects That Matter: Successful Planning and Evaluation for Religious Organizations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2003), 37.

- Understand impact on participants.
- Analyze strategy.

Working closely with other organizations and community partners to eliminate additional strain on the church budget can improve the motivation and inspiration required in getting people engaged. This project will allow one to utilize the necessary tools and skillsets, showing how working in partnership, collaboration, and networking can and will increase member involvement and engagement. Understanding the opportunities of non-profit operations and resources is important. In *Non-Profit Legends for Humanity and Good Citizenship*, we learn from Hank Moore that

The biggest source of growth and increased opportunities in today's business climate lie in the way that individuals and companies work together. It is becoming increasingly rare to find an individual or organization that has not-yet been required to team with others. Lone rangers and sole-source providers simply cannot succeed in competitive environments and global economies. Those who benefit from collaborations, rather than become the victim of them, will log the biggest successes in business years ahead. Just as empowerment, team building, and other processes apply to formal organization structures, then teams of independents can likewise benefit from the concepts. There are rules of protocol that support and protect partnership...having a direct relationship to those who profit most from teamwork. Definitions of these three terms will help to differentiate their intended objectives: Collaboration is with parties that willingly cooperate together. Working jointly with others, especially in an intellectual pursuit. Cooperation with an instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected. Partnering is a former relationship between two or more associates, which involves close cooperation among parties, with each having a specified and joint rights and responsibilities. Joint-Venturing is when partners come together for specific purposes or projects that may be beyond the scope of individual members. Each retains individual identity. The joint-venture itself had its own identity, reflection favorably upon work to be done and upon the partners.¹⁰

¹⁰ Hank Moore, *Non-Profit Legends Comprehensive Reference on Community Service, Volunteerism, Non-Profits and Leadership for Humanity and Good Citizenship* (New York, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2017), 169-170.

Conclusion

Through the years, St. James UMC pastors' vision and mission statements display the urgency of individual's intentional engagement and community involvement surrounding the concern from social justice, ministry of the poor, and the community for the least, the lost, and forgotten. In completing this project, a model of development is created to equip and educate people to increase and fulfill the mission of the local church to transform the world. We will fully engage individuals into the life of kingdom building through social justice movements while using community action, engagement, and building. Micah 6:6-8 reminds us of our charge and assignment from Christ:

With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Mi. 6:6-8).

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Christians were called to be the hands and feet of Jesus in the broken world. This chapter explores the many ways in which the laity engages in kingdom building. Through networking, partnership, collaboration, and context, laity engages in community action and community engages in the Social Justice Movement. God demonstrates God's love for all through God's actions. God's love gives opportunities to build a loving and lasting relationship. Persons reap the harvest when their Lord and Savior blesses their tithes and offerings. They will encounter the blessing that comes from honoring God's love through obedience to the law. Confession of their faith, which demonstrates their unwavering belief, saved them from those that tried to enslave them. It illustrates what God did for humankind throughout history and the importance of improving humankind's relationship with God. Motivating, encouraging, and inspiring others to love God with all one's heart, mind, and soul enhances one's spiritual journey.

Learning Christian responsibilities will be essential for knowing how to engage in using gifts and talents given by God. Thorough research provides greater insight, as Stephen M. Merino explains in "Religious Involvement and Bridging Social Ties: The Role of Congregational Participation." He writes that "several studies suggest that religious involvement beyond worship services is a meaningful predictor of civic

engagement that may foster bridging social capital or ties that bridge social groups and cross lines of status and identity.”¹ Jesus shared with his disciples their assignment, which was to strengthen their faith connection with the hope that this connection would enable his disciples to make necessary life changes. Matthew records the following exchange:

Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest? He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Mt. 22:36-40).

Pleasing Jesus and living an extraordinary life neither gives Christians an advantage nor earns them salvation. Loving one’s neighbor is one of the critical assignments Jesus gave. One must follow Jesus because it allows one to have a closer relationship and better one’s purpose in life. Doing so also leads one to have the reward and honor of serving and being called a child of Jesus Christ, who is Lord and Savior. Christians must stay ready for Christ’s return by living obediently to obtain the promised reward. How do Christians learn to engage with members and the community as a whole? Weber shares a perfect example of what Christians would do and look for on this Christian journey. He writes that

Every Christian is entrusted with some responsibility for the kingdom. Some will take this seriously and invest their lives wisely, and others will squander this responsibility. The part of the kingdom entrusted to each of us is precious to the Lord. He is hurt by the mishandling of a lifetime of opportunity, but he rejoices over a life well spent. He has placed in our hands what is his own. This is a sobering thought – to be stewards of kingdom resources.²

¹ Stephen M. Merino, “Religious Involvement and Bridging Social Ties: The Role of Congregational Participation,” *Socio-Historical Examination of Religion and Ministry* 1, no. 2 (2019): 291-308, <https://doi.org/10.33929/sherm.2019.vol1.no2.10>.

² Stuart Weber, “Matthew, The Kings, Says, ‘Do Not Delay or Put off Faithfulness - I Am Coming,’” in *Holman New Testament Commentary*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 420, Logos Bible Software.

This research project explores ways to engage laity using St. James UMC as the context and test case. The goal is the development of a model that equips, motivates, and educates individuals to fulfill their missional assignments in local communities. The desire is to use the current resources, including all forms of technology and social media, and give practical examples of how to equip children to in becoming adults. The project further desires to expand the opportunities to gain knowledge by offering community service hours for students thereby building on a foundation from an early age.

The biblical passage is Matthew 25:31-46. Matthew, a Jew, wrote to the Jewish nation (approximately thirty years after Jesus' ministry) about their long-expected Messiah-King. Naturally, a Jewish audience familiar with the Old Testament wanted some answers. How could Jesus be the Messiah and end up crucified? If Jesus really was the "King of the Jews," what happened to the kingdom? Matthew answered their questions by relying heavily on their Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah-King. Matthew's purpose was to demonstrate that Jesus, the carpenter from Nazareth, was indeed and truthfully the promised Messiah of Old Testament prophecy.

Matthew proved with a careful genealogy, easily confirmed in temple records of the time, that Jesus was the only rightful heir to the throne through his earthly guardian-father Joseph. Matthew then moved through Jesus' life in a thematic or synthesizing way (rather than simply historical/chronological), drawing together similar thematic elements (e.g., many miracles are lumped together in chapters eight through ten) from different times in Jesus' ministry to leave a systematic, comprehensive, and conclusive picture that Jesus was indeed the Messiah-King. Matthew's friends knew him by the name Matthew, while some called him Levi. He was a tax collector for the Roman government. His status

in Jewish society was even lower than a Gentile because he robbed and betrayed his own people. No one could have guessed that God carefully prepared him to write holy scripture. Matthew recorded his call to follow Jesus as one of the twelve disciples. In Matthew 9:9-13, he writes:

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when he heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners” (Mt. 9:9-13).

Matthew was probably the group’s journalist, keeping records of Jesus’ teaching and actions with his attention to detail. Sometime in the 50s or 60s AD, two or three decades after Jesus finished his work on earth, Matthew’s record-keeping skills merged with his love for the Old Testament to produce his Gospel—a solid argument for the identity of Jesus as the promised Messiah, written for Jewish readers throughout the Mediterranean world.³

Having an opportunity to sit at the feet of grandmothers who demonstrated love through the teaching and examples of Jesus, she set the path for mission and ministry. They taught the word of the Lord through action so we would be ready for Judgment Day. These grandmothers included Julia Christina Diggs Richards (1898-2004), born in Fayette, Missouri, who was known as a woman of faith as a member of Taylor Chapel United Methodist Church in Sedalia, Missouri, since 1907. These grandmothers also included Lossie Dora Rogers Moore (1907-1987), born in Siler City, North Carolina,

³ Weber, “Matthew, The Kings, Says, ‘Do Not Delay or Put off Faithfulness - I Am Coming,’” 3.

known as a woman of hope as a member of St. Matthew AME Church in Burlington, North Carolina.

Abraham spoke of the legacy of his people that they would allow God's grace and mercy to cover and bless persons of faith. These grandmothers set the example for having a compassionate and giving heart to care for others. This heritage of boldness and confidence reigns supreme. Morris writes

Jesus makes it clear that on Judgment Day, there are going to be some surprises. There will be people who will be rewarded for doing kind things to the Lord, only to find that what they did to all kinds of insignificant people were kind things done to the Lord who was in them. So, also others will be punished for failing to make use of their opportunities to serve lowly folk, and for thereby failing to make use of opportunities to serve him.⁴

The roots of one's heritage form like the deep roots of a mighty oak tree, long and intertwining into the ground, all while forming a solid foundation. One's hope is built on nothing less than Jesus Christ and righteousness. Looking into the rich history of one's assignment from God requires one to understand the direction one must follow in caring for fellow human beings. Seeing the world and all the destruction reminds one that pandemics, plague, and famine were around for centuries. The author of Exodus writes that "For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth" (Ex. 9:13). The world stopped due to a modern-day plague. The coronavirus pandemic is a coronavirus disease discovered in 2019 (COVID-19) caused by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus two (SARS-CoV-2). This virus took the world by storm by causing illness and leading to great loss of life. One must rely on one's biblical

⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 634, Logos Bible Software.

foundation, which reminds one that God was in the blessing business by protecting and providing essential guidance for humankind to follow. Different destructions come, which cause one to seek God's assignment.

We witnessed firsthand a small village in Mozambique, where a community of women were isolated because they were widows without any right to property. While attending a board meeting of the General Commission on the Role and Status of Women led by the first woman elected Bishop from Africa, Bishop Joaquina Filipe Nhanala addressed the needs of widows in the Mozambique Central Conference. In 2008, the board witnessed firsthand the disparities widows experienced daily. The lack of essential home care items, feminine products, and bathroom needs was truly eye-opening.

As the global impact committee chair, the responsibility to provide educational and practical solutions for the needs of the different areas of the international community was understated and paramount. During a site visit, the bishop explained the widows' situation in detail. The bishop gave a clearer understanding of their need, heartache, and pain to address their concerns. The recommendation included a blessings shower or a housewarming party that gifts widows with items to meet their basic needs, including bedding, blankets, pillows, and towel sets. To raise funds for the widows, our committee developed an advance number shelter for Displaced Widows Advance #14507J Country Mozambique with the United Methodist Global Missions. This is a global understanding of the mission for an ongoing opportunity for the mission for widows to continue. Bishop Nhanala was unfamiliar with this recommended concept, but the unconditional love, kindness, and generosity overjoyed and amazed her village and pastors who served the

widows because the act would bless them for many years to come. This is consistent with the Global Ministries effort. In fact,

The history of Global Ministries has, since the inception of its predecessor organizations, guided the agency to implement its programs throughout the entire connection, focusing on expanding the presence of the church and facilitating its participation in God's mission in all geographic and political contexts in which the church is called to serve. Moving from a distinction between "home" and "foreign" missions, to "national" and "world" divisions, to a global understanding of missions as the presence and action of God in the world, who invites us to participate in all areas of service, and to a practice of missions "from everywhere to everywhere," Global Ministries has maintained its identity as an agency that is present and serving the global connection.⁵

God, where does one turn when all hope is gone? God, what does one do when one stops at the light and sees others asking for money by holding signs saying, "out of work," "need to feed my family," "help a veteran out," and so on? God, who cares for those sleeping under the bridges or pushing the shopping cart with all their belongings? God, what about those homeless students that have nowhere to go? What about those parents needing diapers for the babies and children?

As Christians in their daily lives, coming and going, one would have to be blind not to see the needs of God's children daily. For centuries there were individuals in need; turning one's head or closing one's eyes will not make it disappear or go away. To fulfill the assignment by God, one must understand the importance of the membership of one's congregation. The research found in "Religious Involvement and Volunteering:

Implications for Civil Society" explains that

Church attendance may also influence volunteering through the formation of social networks and sense of community (Park and Smith 2000). For example, someone volunteering for an activity that benefits her children may volunteer in the church because she is motivated by both an emotional attachment to those of the same faith and friendship ties to congregation members whom she trusts to

⁵ Global Ministries, "A History of Global Ministries," Global Ministries, <https://www.umcmmission.org/learn-about-us/history>.

make a real commitment to the particular volunteer activity in which she is interested.⁶

The context of interest utilized a partnership with the Caring for Kids program. The program's mission is accomplished through a proven four-step process to engage the community including churches, businesses, and civic groups/nonprofits to serve collaboratively around neighborhood schools. This program works with the superintendents, district leadership, and individual school principals to identify potential school partnership projects that best support the goals of an individual school.⁷ The program succeeded in engaging all members, regardless of whether they have children to participate in changing their lives for a brighter future. The program includes being there for the first day of school to welcome students and family members, guide students to their classrooms, and provide necessary supplies. The program provided two of the significant items mostly requested by two partnered schools—socks and coats. Individuals realize that they can sow seeds of hope and self-esteem in the lives of these children regardless of whether they have children of their own.

Other organizations pride themselves on the work for children, including one that focused and centered around God. The United Methodist Women organization's mission statement is "United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as expanded concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church."⁸ The Book of Matthew shares how

⁶ Penny Edgell Becker and Pawan H. Dhingra, "Religious Involvement and Volunteering: Implications for Civil Society," *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 3 (2001): 315-335, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712353>.

⁷ Caring for Kids KC, "Home," Caring for Kids KC, <https://www.caringforkidskc.org/>.

⁸ United Methodist Women, "United Methodist Women: Faith, Hope, and Love in Action," United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/>.

important it is for one to remember Judgement Day and follow Jesus Christ so one can make a direct connection between one's love of Jesus Christ and care for his children. This leads many people to engage in opportunities to serve. Being community-minded is not only for parents of children, as evidenced by my answering the call when singing and being a leader for the Brownie troop at St. James UMC. For ten years, my efforts provided self-esteem, built confidence, and shared the love of Jesus Christ for young ladies. The commitment to instilling into the lives of young children provided a lifelong journey that still provides rewards today. Seeing these young ladies now being bold, confident, and Christian women affirms the time and talent sowed into them many years ago. The teaching included sound guidance and direction. Now, when the call comes for volunteers for community service activities, it always warms one's heart to see them participate.

The calling for laity must encourage and motivate others to do the Lord's work. Matthew chapter twenty-five reports that judgment from the Lord will be strong, but if Christians stand firm on a foundation, they can accomplish the task at hand. While working in Lafayette, Louisiana, in the fall of 2015 for hurricanes Katrina and Wilma relief, the opportunity existed to serve God during this stay while attending worship services and Bible study at Immanuel UMC under the leadership of Rev. Clifton Conrad, Senior Pastor, and his wife Kathleen Concord. This church provided an invitation to worship and participate in mission and ministry, preparing meals for the homeless displaced by the two hurricanes. Hebrews reads

Looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such

hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart (Heb. 12:2-3).

This scripture teaches readers not to judge individuals in any way but only to uplift and inspire them. One never knows what individuals experience in their lives. God is pleased when Christians can share their joys and happiness with others while they need spiritual uplifting. God called followers of Jesus Christ to provide a sense of hope for a brighter future giving those seeking a better life an opportunity to see God's goodness and mercy.

Matthew writes, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory" (Mt. 25:31). Morris writes:

Jesus' whole earthly life had been one of lowliness and service; now he looks forward to a coming that will be strikingly different. He does not define his glory, but clearly, he means that when he returns at the end of this age, he will come in majesty and splendor. His servants must not be misled by his readiness to take the lowly place and think that is his only place. His second coming will be strikingly different.⁹

Ministry connection is something an individual must feel within the individual's heart and soul. From an early age, we witnessed responsibilities firsthand through the lives of our parents, the late Ret. CW4 David F. Richards (1929-2019) and retired Associate Professor Swannie Richards (1922-2018) who's wonderful and blessed marriage lasted close to sixty years. They set a foundation for living a life following Jesus Christ and giving back. Both brought hope and wholeness to the marginalized. They demonstrated that one's relationship with Jesus Christ would allow one to weather the storms in life and demonstrated how to pay it forward with one's gifts and talents. They provided a foundation upon which one would build throughout life. Their children learned through their examples to be respectful by honoring parents through one's actions and adhering to

⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 635.

their godly instructions. As a result, their children would not stray from their teachings and please God even after departing their household.

Rev. David F. Richards III, a senior pastor of New Hope AME Church, is gifted in prayer and serving the poor. He was responsible for organizing a feeding event for 8000 people who were part of twenty-two organizations. In the winter of 2004, a storm caused a major crisis of getting food to thousands of people in need. My beloved sister, Dr. Bonnye Richards Anthony, is a pediatric dentist who volunteers on the mobile dental bus for different health care events, providing the needed dental exams and care for a healthy life. Our parents instilled in us a firm foundation encouraging us to investigate every opportunity that is made available. Jesus' teaching leads Christians to follow directions in becoming hearers and doers of the powerful Word. Our actions and behavior are a powerful testament to the love of God. Knowing that the assignment set forth by God is a reassuring guiding force, Christians must step into helping the least, the lost and forgotten. "Religious Involvement and Volunteering: Implications for Civil Society" explains that "We argue that congregations draw members into volunteering through the social networks they generate and through members' understandings of the fit between the congregation's identity and mission and their own beliefs and values."¹⁰

When reading and studying the scripture in the Bible, it is important to understand and interpret. Through attending Bible study regularly and doing daily devotionals, one gains greater insight and a more robust ability to use this knowledge in daily living. We witnessed firsthand from parents David and Swannie Richards, who were community

¹⁰ Becker, "Religious Involvement and Volunteering," 315-335.

leaders and activists putting their beliefs and values into daily life, how such work provides an everlasting impact on many lives. Wolfer explains that:

Congregational and community leaders seeking to recruit, match, and retain volunteers need to understand how boomers' perceptions and motivations of volunteering affect their willingness to take part in volunteering after retirement. Aging baby boomers may have more time in retirement, but perceptions are crucial in whether or not they volunteer with the free time available to them.¹¹

When serving in an aging community, one must never overlook the baby boomers as they understand the commitment and using time wisely. They are dependable on completing that one task, which can be only once a year. This age group grew up when the church held Vacation Bible School for a week, including a meal. Baby boomers understand the phrase "well done, my good and faithful servant." Knowing that Jesus will return, and you want to go with him is a motivation always to do one's best.

Matthew writes, "All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left" (Mt. 25:32-33). Weber clarifies that "sheep and goats were sometimes herded together down a chute that was wide enough for only one animal at a time. A shepherd would sit atop the fence, swinging a gate back and forth to guide each animal through the appropriate opening to join its own kind."¹² Weber continues by noting that

This passage provides a clearer explanation of how we are to be ready and, on the alert, awaiting the Messiah's return. We are to fill our lives with care for the needs of others, especially the needs of fellow believers, realizing that every

¹¹ Terry A. Wolfer et al., "Baby Boomers as Congregational Volunteers in Community Ministry," *Religions* 8, no. 4 (2017): 1-18, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8040066>.

¹² Weber, "Matthew, The Kings, Says, 'Do Not Delay or Put off Faithfulness - I Am Coming,'" 424.

unbeliever is a potential “brother” of the Messiah. This is truly the work of the kingdom.¹³

One must always look for ways to serve the Lord daily. Employees are often told not to mix workplace and religion as it can cause disagreements that make individuals uncomfortable. Living out the scripture is a joy and a pleasure to find ways of walking one’s spiritual journey and bringing along one’s coworkers. As a catastrophe adjuster, it was energizing to display how being engaged in mission ministry allows one to experience firsthand what is required to be the hands and feet of Jesus. As a Christian, it was necessary to bring others along on the journey.

One of the best places to serve God’s children is the Ronald McDonald House (RMHC), founded in 1974. RMHC created programs that strengthen families during difficult times. RMHC provides vital resources and compassionate care to children and their families that leading hospitals worldwide serve. Core RMHC programs, including Ronald McDonald House, Ronald McDonald Family Room, and Ronald McDonald Care Mobile programs, provide access to health care and enable family-centered care.¹⁴ Knowing one’s coworkers was essential to have a plan of action in place that required approval from management. Once management approved, it was necessary to explain the opportunity to change the lives of ill children and families. The group collected travel-size toiletry items consisting of soap, shampoo, conditioner, and lotion as most families travel with just the clothes on their backs. After collecting everything, those involved in

¹³ Weber, “Matthew, The Kings, Says, ‘Do Not Delay or Put off Faithfulness - I Am Coming,’” 423.

¹⁴ Ronald McDonald House, “About Us,” Ronald McDonald House, <https://www.rmhc.org/about-us>.

this effort added clothing hangers to the supplies and delivered them to the Ronald McDonald House at the Houston, Texas location.

When seeing persons in need, one must find ways to provide an opportunity to make their lives better. A mission trip to Kindu, Africa, which is in the Democratic Republic of Congo, provided an opportunity to visit local churches and experience the many ways they ministered to their communities. The bishop provided an opportunity for the ability to share with United Methodist Women Leaders in that area. The group gathered at a local church, which was around five miles from the original location. To understand how important this was to the women, one must understand the environment. The women did not have cars and, as a result, some walked while others rode on the back of motorbikes. Sharing leadership skills and planning tips on how to do ministry for the children affirmed the gifts, skills, and talents God provided. This meeting came about because a brave woman leader stood up to ask if they could meet with the Black woman leader of United Methodist Women from the United States. A translator was instrumental in ensuring the gathering was meaningful and instrumental in understanding what was needed for the women leaders to move forward in doing ministry for the community.

Joining the group of pastors and laity the next day changed me as it changed my understanding of giving and sacrifice. After attending a praise service with the community, the group visited the pastor's home next door. In 2009, the pastor's home, a four-room cinder block home, was partially destroyed and the group learned that the pastor and his wife slept in a room with a dirt floor. The rest of that day was a fog as the mind could not understand or comprehend the notion of the pastor and wife who walked everywhere for miles could sleep in this manner. I spoke with the guide and members of

the group regarding purchasing them a mattress for a good night's rest. The request caused a little detour in the plans but for a beautiful and great cause. The delivery of the queen-sized mattress overwhelmed the couple, and they were greatly appreciative.

The right side was considered the side of honor and authority, as when a person was seated at the right hand of a king (Mt. 20:21-23, Mt. 22:44, Mt. 26:64). This was the side of the sheep, who one can identify as Jesus' faithful disciples of all ages because of the higher value of the sheep and their placement on the Messiah's right. On the left, the position of lesser honor were the goats. These are clearly identified as the faithless.

Morris writes,

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; Which meant "These were the most common of the smaller domestic animals, and of the two the sheep were prized the more highly. The two groups of animals would graze together, but in due course, the shepherd would separate them out (most commentators agree that the goats were more sensitive to cold than the sheep so that at the end of the day the separation had to be made, the goats being put in a warmer place to keep both groups comfortable through the cooler hours of the night). Thus, Jesus is referring to a well-known pastoral practice. His hearers would be well aware of separation into two sharply different groups. He gives no explanation as to why these names are chosen for the groups, but it emerges that those called sheep are those who receive a favorable judgment, and those called goats are those regarded unfavorably. It accords with this that the sheep are on his right and the goats on his left, for the right-hand side was generally seen as the favored side; for example, to be at the ruler's right hand was to be in the place of highest honor the ruler could give. The left was thought of as the side of ill omen (see the note on 20:21), so it is the appropriate place for the less favored goats.¹⁵

To better understand how we build on a relationship with Jesus, we learn that there is a mutual love relationship with God in the discernment. Vacek writes,

When the faith community becomes too attached to its surrounding culture and circumstances and allows memory to fade, it begins to believe that its life depends upon its circumstances rather than upon the grace of God. Then, along with memory, gratitude recedes into the background, and there is no strength or

¹⁵ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 637.

motivation for mission. Any congregation will abandon the gospel if given half a chance and must be reminded over and over again by word and sacrament where its true life lies.¹⁶

Daily living tests the spiritual awareness of those coming to the Promised Land. Lack of knowledge in one's surroundings allows for faults and religious leaders to mislead those not in tune. God showed them from God's promise that following God's commandment results in a life free of fear. Often, persons seek instant gratification for what they want. Some Christians forget that God can handle all things. Christians sometimes have a short memory of what God did for them in the past. One can lose the focus and vision of one's goals to accomplish. God promised never to leave one's side, but a limited or weak spiritual life can cause one to lose the direction one needs to take. Waking up should be a daily reminder of what God did for one's life. Most individuals will want more than just to wake up, so they must find ways to remember through daily reading and participating in spiritual awareness events to keep their memories from fading. Some ways to refresh one's memory include reading daily devotionals that share stories from the lives of ordinary citizens about how God made their lives better.

Another way of keeping the memory fresh includes using a journal for self-reflection of what God has done that day and one of the favorite ways of keeping God's blessing fresh is connecting with others who need prayer. Those coming to the Promised Land see the promise of God upon their arrival. God reminded them of what was promised and fulfilled for those who believed in God. Vacek adds that

What we discern depends on our historical moment and on the capacities, we have at the time. God's communication with us will have to be in the language, the concepts, the intuitions, the values, the affections, etc., that we have or are

¹⁶ Edward Collins Vacek, "Discernment within a Mutual Love Relationship with God: A New Theological Foundation," *Theological Studies* 74, no. 3 (2013): 683-710, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004056391307400307>.

capable of developing at the time. Just as God must “use” our arms to comfort our newborn infant, so also God must “use” our own thinking and feeling to be involved in our decisions.¹⁷

One sees God’s love and concerns for those arriving in the Promised Land with God sharing how they will be freed from the bondage of their past. Those that arrive with hopefulness seemed desperate for freedom from the life of slavery. They follow God’s commandment fully with the hopes of a better life. God prepares them to receive God’s blessing but wants them to understand the history of where they came from as it was vital for them to share with others.

There are several ways in which God reaches out to communicate with humankind, but often persons miss it. The inspiration of God’s goodness led to assisting others to witness God’s spirit in accomplishing their goals. One must be willing to involve God entirely in all plans, missions, or visions in one’s life. Once God’s spirit gets into one’s life, it is hard to turn away from God’s blessings. God wants persons to know that God is always available for them. Those now in the Promised Land live from the reward of offering the first harvest flowing now with milk and honey. Deuteronomy says, “[God] brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (Dt. 26:9). The promise and fulfillment of God’s word provide the people a land rich in God’s faithfulness and goodness.

One of the important things shared in Matthew is the establishment of the relationship formed with God. “Relationships between God and People,” says that “Relationship with God can facilitate the adoption of beneficial behaviors, for example, by way of individuals feeling more secure and nurtured (by God) or by ‘doing what God

¹⁷ Vacek, “Discernment within a Mutual Love Relationship with God,” 703.

wants,' when what God wants is beneficial or adaptive for people.”¹⁸ The development of the relationship with the people formed long before they arrived at the Promised Land. The people knew that they would be free once they reached the Promised Land as God's word never fails.

Establishing a relationship with God requires the full giving of the mind, body, and soul. One must be willing to make those tough decisions when one's faith is tested. One historical perspective can provide the witness of God's grace and mercy, giving one the necessary support and comfort when one crosses the tested moment. Building relationships provide excellent opportunities to expand one's ability and options to serve. Being a part of the United Methodist Church Connections allows for crossing paths with others who share the same passion in mission and ministry. An example of this is being invited to serve on a newly created board as the Community Development of Flourish Furnishings. Their website states that Flourish Furnishing (FF) partners with secular and non-secular social service organizations. They provide social service case management to eligible families and individuals and refer them to Flourish. Referrals to the ministry include those who have come out of homelessness through self-sufficiency programs, children in and those teens aging out of the foster care system, domestic abuse victims, veterans, disaster victims, and those being released from incarceration. These households do not have the furnishings or household goods for which they ask, have no other means

¹⁸ Carol P. Weingarten et al., "Relationships between God and People: An Interpersonal Study of Scriptures," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 24, no. 2 (2014): 135, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10508619.2013.772000>.

to obtain what they need, and are responsible for scheduling their appointment time and securing adequate transportation to pick up their furnishings.¹⁹

Matthew says, “For I was hungry, and you gave me food, I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me” (Mt. 25:35). Great need exists during the holiday times, especially around Thanksgiving and Christmas, but everyday individuals outside of these holidays lack enough to eat. Having a deeply rooted understanding of one’s calling leads one to be involved in several community feeding programs. Such involvement reveals the need for more individuals to give. As a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., the mission statement says:

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated was founded 112 years ago on a mission comprised of five basic tenets that have remained unchanged since the sorority’s inception more than a century ago. Alpha Kappa Alpha’s mission is to cultivate and encourage high scholastic and ethical standards, to promote unity and friendship among college women, to study and help alleviate problems concerning girls and women in order to improve their social stature, to maintain a progressive interest in college life, and to be of “Service to All Mankind.” The small group of women who founded Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority at the turn of the last century was conscious of their privileged position as college-trained women of color, just one generation removed from slavery. But at the same time, they were sensitive to the needs and struggles of the less fortunate in underserved communities in their hometowns and in other environs beyond their travels who were in need of goods, services, and opportunities beyond their reach. The young collegians’ commitment to scholarship, leadership, civic engagement, and public service, woven together by the bonds of lifelong sisterhood, formed the bedrock of the rich legacy of servant-leadership that epitomizes the sorority to this day. And the global reach of its programs, laser-focused on the health, wealth, family, education, human rights, and parity issues that concern its constituents, ensure the relevance of the organization into perpetuity.²⁰

¹⁹ Nonprofit Connect, “Flourish Furnishings,” Nonprofit Connect, <https://info.npconnect.org/list/member/flourish-furnishings-115316>.

²⁰ Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., “Mission,” Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., <http://aka1908.com/about/mission>.

Being involved in an organization that embodies the focus on service to all humankind allows one to align one's passion for mission and ministry. Central Ave of Hope food kitchen provides an opportunity to serve a meal to those in need and pack a to-go meal for late evening. There is a backpack program for the students on free or reduced lunch at school as most children in the community have little to no food on the weekends. Not wanting to draw attention to those in need since self-esteem is an issue, food items must be stored in a backpack that does not stand out. The program prepares around 500 packs for the Kansas City, Kansas School district. St. James UMC opens the food pantry on the second, third, and fourth Wednesday of the month from 4:30 pm to 6:00 pm, giving individuals in the community the chance to select food for their families. During the holiday times around Thanksgiving and Christmas, the church has around 700 families each time.

The king described the behavior of these kingdom citizens. When he was in need, they were the ones who acted in compassion to meet his needs. He listed six poor conditions including hunger, thirst, alienation, nakedness, sickness, and imprisonment. The list is not exhaustive but representative of all needs that a person might have. Each of these needs is central to the survival and quality of life. Food, drink, clothing, and health are related to the needs of a person's body. Being a stranger (Gr. Xenos, "foreigner, alien") is also related to physical well-being because since an alien usually had no job or other means of support, there was a strong tendency to view him with prejudice and even abuse him. Due to their needy state, Old Testament law protected foreigners along with widows and orphans (Lv. 19:10, Dt. 27:17-19). Someone who was in prison was, likewise, unable to earn a living for himself or his family. In fact, such a person was

dependent on others to bring him food, because the law enforcement system usually did not provide it for him.²¹ Morris adds that

But all this is news to the “sheep,” and they say so. They are now called the righteous; what God has done in them has transformed them into people who are acceptable in his sight and who accordingly do deeds as those Jesus has listed. They ask when they did all these things; they go through Jesus’ list and inquire when they did each of them, listing them one by one. Their surprise (and that later of those who were rejected) is important. It shows clearly that their salvation did not depend on their good works, for in doing those works, they must have known that they were doing things that other people did not do. But clearly, their kindness to the needy was not in order to gain a reward and merit salvation but was part of the way they lived in response to what Christ had done in and for them.²²

Matthew 25:36-40 reminds the reader that looking into one’s future in one’s assignment from God reminds one that when one decides to mistreat people in any manner, one does that to Jesus Christ. Persons must never think they are better than others as they will have to stand before God to atone for each of their wrongdoings. They can ask for forgiveness, but they will not be rewarded when they continue to act in unpleasant ways. There should be a consistent reminder of the judgment day, keeping Christians focused on everything they do as God’s children. Regarding Matthew 25:37–40, Weber invites readers to

Note that the righteous answered in surprise; they did not remember when they had met all these needs of the Messiah. The king began his answer with I tell you the truth, indicating the absolute truthfulness of his next statement. Not all of the righteous served the king to the same degree, but all served with a right heart. The answer continues, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me. By brothers (a generic Gr. term that could also include “sisters”), Jesus meant his followers (his disciples all ages; see Jesus’ new definition of his family in 12:50; cf. 28:10), since we share with him the same Father. Anyone who met the need of even the most insignificant of Jesus’ followers was ministering to him. Jesus identified this closely with his family on earth (Acts 9:4–5). On the

²¹ Weber, “Matthew, The Kings, Says, ‘Do Not Delay or Put off Faithfulness - I Am Coming,’” 425.

²² Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 639.

least among the believers (Mt. 11:11, 18:4, 20:26-28, 23:11, 24:42). We will be faithfully doing the kingdom work if we care for the needs of those around us.²³

Matthew records:

Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life (Mt. 25:41-46).

Vacek writes, “Even though religious discernment typically requires us to use our various cognitive capacities to determine what we should be and do, it also requires God’s involvement. What does it mean to be inspired by God’s Spirit?”²⁴ Those in the Promised Land could feel God’s spirit as their lives became free, and now they reap the benefits of the love of God. One could believe that those waiting on the blessing from God wanted God’s involvement as they wanted to do everything correctly. Persons often fail to seek God’s involvement in what they should do, which causes a failure in accomplishing their goals. One source writes

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat, Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. ‘As for you on the left hand, ye did nothing for Me. I came to you also, but ye knew Me not; ye had neither warm affections nor kind deeds to bestow upon Me: I was as one despised in your eyes.’ ‘In our eyes, Lord? We never saw Thee before, and never, sure, behaved we so to Thee.’ ‘But thus, ye treated these little ones that believe in Me and now stand on My right hand. In the

²³ Weber, “Matthew, The Kings, Says, ‘Do Not Delay or Put off Faithfulness - I Am Coming,’” 427.

²⁴ Vacek, “Discernment within a Mutual Love Relationship with God,” 705.

disguise of these poor members of Mine, I came soliciting your pity, but ye shut up your bowels of compassion from Me: I asked relief, but ye had none to give Me. Take back, therefore, your own coldness, your own contemptuous distance: Ye bid Me away from your presence, and now I bid you from Mine—Depart from Me, ye cursed!’ And these shall go away—these “cursed” ones. Sentence, it should seem, was first pronounced—in the hearing of the wicked—upon the righteous, who thereupon sit as assessors in the judgment upon the wicked (1 Cor. 6:2); but sentence is first executed, it should seem, upon the wicked, in the sight of the righteous—whose glory will thus not be beheld by the wicked, while their descent into “their own place” will be witnessed by the righteous, as Bengel notes. Into everlasting punishment or, as in v. 41, “everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” Compare 2 Thessalonians 1:9-9; These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, this is said to be “prepared for the devil and his angels,” because they were “first in transgression.” But both have one doom, because one unholy character. See on Mark 1:21–39, Remark 1. But the righteous into life eternal, life everlasting.’ The word in both clauses, being in the original the same, should have been the same in the translation also. Thus, the decisions of this awful day will be final, irreversible, unending. “The Lord grant,” to both the writer and his readers, “that they may find mercy of the Lord in that day!” 2 Timothy 1:18.²⁵

Summary

Vogt writes that:

The American church has been so incredibly blessed not because of our righteousness or for our benefit, but rather so that we might use these blessings to care for others. The community to which we have an obligation found throughout the world, and we must remember that we are blessed in part so that we can share with those brothers and sisters who have little or who have nothing. And this is not charity; it is simply the means by which God has chosen to provide for others throughout the world.²⁶

God wants persons to be fully involved in the life of the church. There are several different organizations in which one can volunteer for the betterment of the community.

²⁵ Robert Jamieson, Andrew R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary, Critical, Experimental and Practical, on the Old and New Testament*, vol. 5, *Matthew – John* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1945), 121, Logos Bible Software.

²⁶ Peter T. Vogt, “Social Justice and the Vision of Deuteronomy,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 51, no. 1 (March 8, 2008): 44.

God gave all of Godself so that God's people would offer their time and talents in giving back. Not showing a compassionate heart for following God's instruction demonstrates a lack of respect for God. Persons handed down the tradition of the ages during this timeframe by teaching at home, in the temple, and through close family relatives, thereby keeping a sense of loyalty. Those that follow the traditions should not abandon the focus on following God. One can be distracted to the point in which all focus and reason become lost, which will affect one's faith journey to connect to Jesus. Jesus' hope and prayer for each one is that one would confess one's sins and follow his commandments. Growing more rooted in one's faith journey allows one to realize that some traditions pull one away from God's calling on one's life. Traditions and cultures will never substitute for God's commandments.

Matthew 25:31-46 sets the foundation for a Christian who follows in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus reminds readers that he will return one day and judge the Christian's action of taking care of the least, the lost and forgotten. Jesus does not want his followers to be unprepared in following his direction in using their gifts and talents. In the end, one must stand before Jesus to give an account of one's works. As important as laity involvement is in moving mission and ministry forward, some individuals believe paid staff is responsible for everything. The data shared in "Religious Involvement and Volunteering: Implications for Civil Society" suggests that

Members' impressions of their congregation's core mission remain significant predictors of volunteering. Consider one's congregation as a place of worship or, as a leader, are less likely to volunteer within it. Both types of denote congregational cultures that do not emphasize interpersonal connections or intimacy among members. In such contexts, members may be more prone to rely on paid staff to carry out congregational programming rather than carrying out ministry and programming through volunteer labor (cf. Becker 1999:191-2).²⁷

²⁷ Becker, "Religious Involvement and Volunteering," 315-335.

Lack of direction could be something that would stop most people, but God's assignment requires individuals to be responsible for their spiritual journey with Christ. Morris reminds readers, "That all the nations will come before he makes it clear that Jesus is speaking of the final judgment of the whole race. In the end, each of us must stand before Jesus to give an account of what we have done."²⁸ One's accountability relies on one's own hands. Research and resources will show the many opportunities for being the hands and feet of Jesus. Persons must take ownership, and all opportunities to give honor for the talents and gifts sowed into them by following Jesus Christ.

²⁸ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 635.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The problem on which the historical foundations chapter focuses is a decreasing number of members in the Social Justice Ministry at St. James UMC. The hypothesis statement is that increasing community engagement at St. James UMC in the Social Justice Ministry, will increase the number of members involved by navigating through action. What happens when women organize for mission? The United Methodist Women's organization from 1869 to the present was established through the needs of the women and children wherein social justice was at the forefront of the movement. In 1863, The Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves. In 1864, Congress made it illegal for Native Americans to be taught in their native languages and sent children to boarding schools. In 1865, Reconstruction began, and African Americans gained citizenship rights while mobilizing for public education and elected offices. United Methodist Women uses teaching and discipleship immersion experiences with financial support in keeping social justice at the center of their mission and purpose.

Regarding its purpose, "United Methodist Women shall be a community of women whose purpose is to know God and to experience freedom as whole persons through Jesus Christ, to develop a creative, supportive fellowship, and to expand

concepts of mission through participation in the global ministries of the church.”¹ In recent years, membership in the United Methodist Church and United Methodist Women steadily declined, but United Methodist Women’s commitment to women, children, and youth failed to decline. Their focus and determination are steadfast and unmovable for those in need, be it poverty, lack of access to education, or the injustice taking place in the world. Using United Methodist Women’s deep faith of women willingness to engaged in standing up for others, speaking out, and not being afraid of tackling the hard issues. The actions of these women are for all God’s children. The rich history connected to women of all races is a testament to a willingness to look past what divides others in the world. If one would follow the words of the famous quote from John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist movement, shared hope can spring forth. John Wesley once stated, “Do all the good you can; By all the means you can; In all the ways you can; In all the places you can; At all the times you can; To all the people you can; As long as ever you can.”²

Various social principles govern the United Methodist Church:

The rights and privileges a society bestow upon or withhold from those who comprise it indicate the relative esteem in which society holds persons and groups of persons. We affirm all persons as equally valuable in the sight of God. We, therefore, work toward societies in which each person’s value is recognized, maintained, and strengthened. We support the basic rights of all persons to have equal access to housing, education, communication, employment, medical care, legal redress for grievances, and physical protection. We deplore acts of hate or violence against groups or persons based on race, color, national origin, ethnicity, age, gender, disability, status, economic condition, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religious affiliation. Our respect for the inherent dignity of all persons leads us to call for the recognition, protection, and implementation of the

¹ United Methodist Women, “United Methodist Women Organization: The Purpose,” United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/purpose>.

² John Wesley, “John Wesley Quotes,” 2020 Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/151350.John_Wesley.

principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights so that communities and individuals may claim and enjoy their universal, indivisible, and inalienable rights.³

Learning from the United Methodist Women's organization provides a solid foundation regarding a movement for acting for social justice for those in need, those left out and not invited to the table. The United Methodist Women shows how to use passion, dedication, and commitment to live out one's assignment from God. The legacy of bold and powerful women associated with the United Methodist Women organization through the 150 years will illustrate a foundation that withstood trials and tribulations, making them stronger and bolder in the fight for justice.

United Methodist Women

The United Methodist Women's website states that

Our United Methodist heritage reflects a history of commitment to vital discipleship and social action. John Wesley strongly emphasized the Christian life as a combination of faith and love put into practice. The United Methodist Church affirms these same beliefs today: By joining heart and hand, we assert that personal religion, evangelical witness, and Christian social action are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world. (The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church 2016, 102).⁴

For over 150 years, the United Methodist Women organization stood the test of time, displaying a blueprint for engaging in volunteering with National Mission Institutions worldwide, giving hope to individuals, families, and communities. Its use of hands-on

³ UMCSC, "Social Principles, Social Community," UMCSC, <https://www.umcsc.org/PDF/SocialPrinciples.pdf>.

⁴ United Methodist Women, "United Methodist Women Social Action," United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/action>.

mission projects and educational events that will add insight and opportunity to serve God in a powerful way by using hope and love as a motivator in one's compassionate heart. Being a leader in society for other women allows one to serve God in a powerful way. We allow the passion and commitment of giving God our best as United Methodist Women. When women are told they cannot do or have access to what their male counterpart was considered a privilege. Further, having or receiving services such as health care and educational learning or training was also considered a privilege. In the heart of several women, it became clear that they seek ways to eliminate injustice on several fronts, which required an action plan to accomplish their goals.

Hearing stories of women, children, and girls lacking adequate medical and health care and living in poverty stirred a passion in a group of women called Women's Home Missionary Society. These women worked collectively by collaborating, partnering, and networking with others in society who had the same compassionate heart and endurance to make life better for all those in need. Early in this organization, it became essential to communicate and work together regardless of one's location. Such women included independently thinking women such as Mrs. William (Clementina) Butler and Mrs. Edwin W. (Lois) Parker, who were wives of missionaries to India. In Boston, they addressed Methodist Women about the need for single, trained, and dedicated women for medical and educational work. The success of the United Methodist Women to date comes from understanding the key to their purpose, which is "knowing God" as the daughter of the highest. The Bible provides several examples of that including Matthew 22:36-40, which states

"Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with

all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Bold, courageous, faithful, and giving are just a few of the words used to describe the passionate heartbeat of United Methodist Women. When attending any event, you will hear how this impactful organization began. The story always begins with how it was a dark, stormy night when the eight ladies gathered in the church, which was locked when they arrived. That failed to stop or deter the women from meeting and putting in place a plan of action. Women of the Foreign Missionary Society got ready to set the world on fire. That night a plan was developed to provide medical and educational needs in India due to the lack of women doctors and educators.

During that period, men would only provide medical care to men. Learning skills and obtaining educational degrees provided a solution to the critical problem. In 1870, Clara Swain, the first woman doctor, was sent to India by the Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society. Also, Isabella Thoburn, the first missionary of the Methodist Episcopal Church Woman’s Foreign Missionary Society, founded a girls school that later became Isabella Thorburn College—the first women’s college in Asia. The women who chose to devote themselves to United Methodist Women and its predecessors contributed mightily to God’s work in the world. They were responsible for positive change within the church, their communities, and worldwide. Knowing a little about the stories of even a few of them enriches lives and understanding of the organization. When women dared to change the world for the better, they discovered that they too were changed.

The significance of the timeline of the Predecessor organization provides a detailed account of how important it was to never quit or give up. The Methodist church

went through several mergers in which other organizations ceased, but the women whose passion and commitment to the least, the lost, and forgotten never wavered. Ellen Blue explains the significance of

The Predecessor's organization providing a historical timeline showing how the "purpose" from 150 years ago is still the same regarding being there for the vulnerable and forgotten part of society. It will show how the women worked in connection, partnership, and engagement for the community for all women dedicated to social justice as a focal point in making the world better.⁵

Timeline of Predecessor Organizations

1869-1939	Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (Methodist Episcopal Church)
1875	Woman's Missionary Association (United Brethren in Christ)
1878-1910	Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (Methodist Episcopal Church, South)
1879-1928	Woman's Foreign Missionary Society (Methodist Protestant Church)
1880-1939	Woman's Home Missionary Society (Methodist Episcopal Church)
1884	Woman's Missionary Society Christian Service Guild (Evangelical Association)
1888	Methodist Episcopal Church deaconess program
1888	Five Methodist Episcopal women elected to General Conference but not seated
1888	Methodist Protestant Church grants voting rights to women
1890-1910	Woman's Home Missionary Society (Methodist Episcopal Church, South)
1891	Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society (United Evangelical Church)
1891	Woman's Missionary Society (Evangelical Association)

⁵ Ellen Blue, *Women United for Change: 150 Years in Mission* (New York, NY: Mission Study Book, 2019), 15.

1893	United Brethren in Christ grants voting rights to women
1893-1928	Woman's Home Missionary Society (Methodist Protestant Church)
1897	United Brethren in Christ approves deaconess program
1900	Methodist Episcopal Church approves women to be seated as delegates to General Conference
1902	Methodist Episcopal Church, South, approves deaconess program
1903	Evangelical Association approves deaconess program
1904	Women are first seated at Methodist Episcopal General Conference
1908	Methodist Protestant Church approves deaconess program
1968	The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren merge to form The United Methodist Church. ⁶

The women's organizations of the two denominations merged in the new United Methodist Church under the Women's Society of Christian Service and Wesleyan Service Guild. Administrative responsibility was assigned to the Women's Division of the Board of Missions. In 1972, the women's organizations in the United Methodist Church merged to form one inclusive organization named United Methodist Women. In 1972, the General Conference ratified the formation of United Methodist Women, and the "Agreements of '64" in all essentials are preserved.⁷

In 2012, the United Methodist Church General Conference voted to make the United Methodist Women's national policymaking body autonomous. United Methodist Women's Board President at the time was Yvette Richards, who quoted John 20:1-2 in saying:

⁶ Blue, *Women United for Change*, 15.

⁷ United Methodist Women, "Living the Legacy: The Continuing Journey of Women in Mission," United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/about/history/timeline>.

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have put him!' (Jn. 20:1-2).

United Methodist Women were all up early to check on others and were caretakers from the beginning. Women were always concerned about getting up early to check on others. The words to the song "Because He Lives" allow women to continue their front-line duties to make sure marginalized voices are heard and those left behind achieve justice. Since the Savior lives, women, children, and youth will resist racial injustice and win change. They will know through living the United Methodist Women's purpose of staying vibrant and active in seeking ways to include those whom society labeled as unwanted, and hear "fear not, I am with you" (Isa. 41:10). Knowing that Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early that morning, and when she found the tomb empty, she went running to share the news is essential.

United Methodist Women members, at their best, expose and share the news of injustice while also having a plan of action to show others concrete ways to stop injustice. Racial injustice is a reality that continues to hover over with harmful and deadly outcomes, thereby ruining lives and families beyond what can ever be measured. Sin separated injustice and resurrection through faith in Jesus Christ gives hope. The famous quote from Martin Luther King, Jr. shares that "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."⁸ Members of

⁸ The King Center, "The King Philosophy includes the Triple Evils, Six Principles of Nonviolence, Six Steps of Nonviolent Social Changes and the Beloved Community," The King Center, <https://thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy/>.

United Methodist Women embrace and seek to live out the values of the Charter for

Racial Justice:

Charter for Racial Justice in an interdependent global community adopted by the 1980 General Conference of the United Methodist Church because we believe:

1. That God is the Creator of all people, and all are God's children in one family;
2. That racism is a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ;
3. That racism denies the redemption and reconciliation of Jesus Christ;
4. That racism robs all human beings of their wholeness and is used as a justification for social, economic, environmental and political exploitation;
5. That we must declare before God and before one another that we have sinned against our sister and brothers of other races in thought, in word and in deed;
6. That in our common humanity in creation, all women and men are made in God's image, and all persons are equally valuable in the sight of God;
7. That our strength lies in our racial and cultural diversity and that we must work toward a world in which each person's value is respected and nurtured;
8. That our struggle for justice must be based on new attitudes, new understandings and new relationships, and must be reflected in the laws, policies, structures and practices of both church and state;

We commit ourselves as individuals and as a community to follow Jesus Christ in word and in deed, and to struggle for the rights and the self-determination of every person and group of persons.

Therefore, as United Methodists in every place across the land, we will unite our efforts within the church to take the following actions:

1. Eliminate all forms of institutional racism in the total ministry of the church, giving special attention to those institutions that we support, beginning with their employment policies, purchasing practices, environmental policies and availability of services and facilities.
2. Create opportunities in local churches to deal honestly with the existing racist attitudes and social distance between members, deepening the Christian commitment to be the church where all racial groups and economic classes come together.

3. Increase efforts to recruit people of all races into the membership of The United Methodist Church and provide leadership development opportunities without discrimination.
4. Establish workshops and seminars in local churches to study, understand and appreciate the historical and cultural contributions of each race to the church and community.
5. Raise local churches' awareness of the continuing needs for equal education, housing, employment, medical care and environmental justice for all members of the community, and to create opportunities to work for these things across racial lines.
6. Work for the development and implementation of national and international policies to protect the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of all people, such as through support of the ratification of United Nations covenants on human rights.
7. Support and participate in the worldwide struggle for liberation in church and community.
8. Facilitate nomination and election processes that include all racial groups by employing a system that prioritizes leadership opportunities of people from communities that are disproportionately impacted by the ongoing Legacy of racial injustice and use measures to align our vision for racial justice with actions that accelerate racial equality.⁹

The heartbeat of the United Methodist Women's organization is the work done with the National Mission Institutions and through advocacy and service. The United Methodist Women organized for the mission worked in the name of Jesus to take positions on social justice issues, change legislation, systems, structures, and practices considered unjust and oppressive. These bold foremothers advocated to end lynching, improve women's health, raise women's status in society, organized for fair wages and benefits for workers and families, and adopted the Charter for Racial Justice.

⁹ United Methodist Women, "Charter for Racial Justice Woman's Division," United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/download-resources/charter-for-racial-justice-english>.

In 1962, the Woman's Division adopted the "New Charter for Racial Policies," which the General Conference later adopted upon the Woman's Division Petition. The purpose of the new charter was to challenge racial segregation after 1964. In 1972, Mai Gray was the first African American woman elected president of the Women's Division, and in 1978 Women's Division directors adopted the third Charter for Racial Justice addressing institutional racism in church and society. Mai Gray introduced the charter at the United Methodist Women Assembly in Louisville, Kentucky, and thousands of women marched in silent vigil outside the site where the Methodist Episcopal Church separated over slavery more than 100 years earlier. In 1980, the General Conference adopted the Charter for Racial Justice Policies as the policy of the whole church upon the Women's Division petition. At the last General Conference in Portland in 2016, the United Methodist Women's organization adopted the charter.

Following the footsteps of the legendary women who set a precedent for bringing awareness to an area, few would touch and dare to address, Ms. Theresa Hoover was a mentor and guiding force for the Women's Division. In fact,

Theresa Hoover, the first African American Assistance General Secretary whose firsthand knowledge of how to engage in community work with women and men for Mission in the church. Using life experience will show a deep commitment to the work of the Lord. Being involved in social justice and social action will lend a guiding force on how to stay focused on the issues.¹⁰

The United Methodist Women's website also states the following:

United Methodist Women: Turning Financial Gifts into Miracles for Women, Children, and Youth. United Methodist Women is trusted with pledges and donations from individual members and local member organizations, as well as mission partners and anonymous donors who have a heart for Mission. We support programs in the United States and around the world that benefit women, children, and youth - thereby impacting entire communities. As an agency of The

¹⁰ United Methodist Women, "Theresa Hoover, Trailblazer," United Methodist Women Leader, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/about/history/hoover>.

United Methodist Church, United Methodist Women abides by the social principles and discipline as determined by General Conference, giving only to projects in accordance with those guidelines.¹¹

In many ways United Methodist Women were an inspiration and motivator for justice and advocacy in combination with the UMC's National Mission Institutions. National Mission Institutions provide everyday living opportunities for those in need, from infants to seniors. The programs and impact of children and families seen in the National Mission Institutions align with the United Methodist Church family and founders. John Wesley the founder of the Methodist Movement, and his wife Susannah Wesley, have several organizations connected to them, which provide an immediate connection to the foundation of people giving and seeking ways to help others.

The names Bethlehem, Susannah, and Wesley are essential to the United Methodist Women's organization, showing its rich history and connection to what it means to be Methodist. Many of the National Mission Institutions (NMI) have the privilege and honor of a historical legacy. There are ninety-seven National Mission Institutions around the United States that transform lives daily, allowing the compassionate spirit and volunteers the ability to interact and engage with others. In 2008, as a Women's Division Director, we were responsible for visiting and engaging with our National Mission Institutions in our conference.

As a member of the Missouri Conference, there are five NMIs in which communication and partnership allowed firsthand and hands-on opportunities to witness God's work daily. Living out the legacy of this historical organization allowed one to serve God's children of all ages. We taught English as a second language and donated to

¹¹ United Methodist Women, "United Methodist Women Organization What We Fund," United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/what-we-fund>.

their massive food supplies for the surrounding community at Della Lamb Community Services. There are opportunities to talk with young ladies rescued from human trafficking from family members. They are allowed to share a message for the hopeful future and share the love of Jesus. Opportunities exist to ensure the provision of senior programs and meals for balanced and healthy living for the elderly .

Looking into the eyes of young children whose parents decided to no longer be in their lives, to let them know they are still loved, the group proudly made welcome blankets and personal hygiene kits for children to have a sense of home and stability. From the beginning of this organization, the safety of women's lives is a priority in which human trafficking programs provide safety and protection. The program provides an educational and training program for the victim. As a Women's Division Director, it is important to engage in a partnership to collaborate with other districts and units for support in various ways to benefit all involved.

The Missouri Conference provided many opportunities to serve in missions in the following ways. Della Lamb Community Services in Kansas City, Missouri, exists to empower its clients to meet the challenges of education, employment, and self-sufficiency in an ever-changing world. Its vision is that every individual will be nourished, educated, and supported in an atmosphere of love and respect for permitting them to achieve their full potential.

Epworth Children and Family Services in St. Louis, Missouri is a multiservice agency that helps at-risk and in-need children, youth, and families move toward self-sufficiency by focusing on health, housing, education, and employment. Thousands of individuals turn to Epworth each year for foster care case management, residential and

intensive treatment, psychological evaluation, in-home family therapy, emergency shelter services, transitional and independent living, homeless youth outreach, a drop-in center and clinical services, life skills and vocational training, and a twenty-four-hour crisis help-line.

InterServ in St. Joseph, Missouri is a beacon of hope, providing comprehensive social services that reach vulnerable populations throughout Northwest Missouri. It provides individual and family assistance, counseling and case management, immigrant services, in-home, professional medical services, elderly nutrition, infant/childcare, and youth programs. The Spofford campus of Cornerstone of Care in Kansas City, Missouri's mission is the core of what they do. It honors their history, reflects on the day-to-day, and focuses on the future. It leads to designing and delivering programs that improve the lives of more than 10,000 children and families each year.

Susanna Wesley Family Learning Center in Charleston, Missouri assists families who were at risk of out of the home placement of their children for various reasons, including extreme poverty, substance abuse, and lack of parenting skills. Services included parenting classes, life skills classes, adult primary education, and counseling. Early on, it became apparent that the center served many victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

Within the United Methodist Women's organization, several of the National Mission Institutions used one of three familiar Methodist names, which have a significant meaning: Wesley, Susannah, and Bethlehem. As National President of United Methodist Women from 2012-2016, there were opportunities to visit forty-eight in-person showcases during the season. The compassionate spirit of the soul gave one the privilege

to see firsthand the activities and programs that each of these centers offered women, children, and youth worldwide.

Wesley Community House was adopted for neighborhoods with European Americans, often recent immigrants. Later Bethlehem House was adopted for working with African Americans. One of the inspiring women of the movement for the Predecessor organization was Isabel Harris Bennett. Warner writes that

Isabel Harris Bennett (1852-1922) is most often known for her efforts to extend ecclesiastical rights and ministry opportunities to women in the Methodist Episcopal Church South (MECS). Bennett's Christian vocation advocated two sides of the same coin: first, ecclesiastical rights and ministry training for women, in order to, secondly, reach marginalized communities through organized mission work with the Christian gospel. Bennett's ability to practice, and form others to practice, evangelistic ministry with multi-dimensional characteristics through Southern Methodism's Woman's Missionary organizations provide a significant example for the contemporary church. Her remarkably comprehensive Christian vocation included education and evangelism among numerous disenfranchised populations in the United States, as well as the pastors and laywomen within her denomination. Bennett's leadership arguably facilitated the establishment of schools and missions—mostly urban—in Italian, French, Polish, Hungarian, Slav, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Mexican, Latin American, and Cuban immigrant communities. Bennett not only acknowledged the social systems that continued to oppress African Americans in the South, but also the MECS's complicity in those sins during her lifetime.¹²

Bennett provided the foundation for the organization to continue to advocate for social justice for those on the margins. The key to success was leadership training and education opportunities gained in first-hand involvement. "United Methodist Women Equip Leaders" states that

Equipping Women and Girls to Be Leaders-United Methodist Women equips women and girls around the world to be leaders in communities, agencies, governments, and churches. United Methodist Women provides and supports the leadership development of its members to give women of all racial, ethnic, language, and economic groups the opportunity to realize their full potential and to participate in the life of the church and society. We offer leadership

¹² Lacey C. Warner, "Advancing Home Missions: Belle Harris Bennett's Contributions to Southern Methodism," *Methodist History* 55, no. 1-2 (October 2016-January 2017): 86.

development, training, and resources for teen women and college/university women, conference and district leadership of United Methodist Women and Hispanic, Korean, and women of other language groups.¹³

Being involved in the transformation of the leadership training caused a pause at first because change can be intimidating. However, expanding the opportunity for others to benefit from educational and leadership training makes the organization stronger, as it equips leaders and not only officers. When speaking of women's leadership development, some leaders shared by example in the African American community including Belle Harris Bennett (1920). She urged the women of the Woman's Missionary Council to spend a year "investigating living conditions and needs for Southern Blacks."¹⁴ Sallie Sawyer (1913) was a member of the Colored Methodist Episcopal in Nashville, Tennessee. Backed by the Wesley Methodist Church, she started a Bethlehem Center close to Fisk University to serve minorities and underserved neighborhoods.

Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune was one of the spiritual mothers of the Women's Society of Christian Services. Dr. Bethune was one of the most influential African American women in the country. She was the featured speaker at the Central Jurisdiction of the Women's Society of Christian Services charter meeting. Remembering our grandmother sharing with us her connection to Dr. Bethune gave a firsthand understanding of the Movement of African American women in leadership. Julia Christina Diggs Richards received her first job offer from her friend Dr. Mary McLeod to teach at Bethune-Cookman College.

¹³ United Methodist Women, "United Methodist Women Equip Leaders," United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/equip-leaders>.

¹⁴ United Methodist Women, "Called to Justice: Belle Harris Bennett," United Methodist Women, <https://www.unitedmethodistwomen.org/news/belle-harris-bennett>.

As leaders, women contributed to some of the most important historical landmark movements for African Americans. Most famous African American women are unfamiliar with Pauli Murray, a trailblazer sent by the United Methodist Women National Office. She used her educational background in law to assist the organization. Murray was a Howard Law School graduate commissioned by the Christian Social Relations and Local Church Activities of the Women's Division to do research and she wrote *States' Laws on Race and Color* published in 1951. She was also instrumental in the leg work behind the Brown vs. Board of Education landmark case. In the early 1950s, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) worked hard to challenge segregation laws in public schools and filed lawsuits on behalf of plaintiffs in states such as South Carolina, Virginia, and Delaware. In the case that became famous, a plaintiff named Oliver Brown filed a class-action suit against the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, in 1951, after his daughter Linda Brown was denied entrance to Topeka's all-White elementary schools. In his lawsuit, Brown claimed that schools for Black children were not equal to the White schools and that segregation violated the so-called "equal protection clause" of the Fourteenth Amendment, which holds that no state can "deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."¹⁵

History is sometimes closer than one knows. Linda Brown, the daughter, was a greeter at St. James UMC in Kansas City for many years, sharing the same schedule. However, it was not until she was unable to serve one Sunday that upon her return, she quietly shared the trip to the White House meeting President Obama. She then shared that her mother was Linda Brown. Knowing that the United Methodist Women's organization

¹⁵ Constitution Annotated, "The 14th Amendment," Constitution of the United States, <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-14/>.

stood in the trenches for those in need is a proud moment. Pauli Murray's contribution was not taught in school regarding being a trailblazer in the fight for justice in one of the most crucial landmark cases that affected children everywhere. The fight for justice was led by women who were called deaconess and home missionary. One of the legendary women with passion and commitment to others was Barbara Campbell, a legendary deaconess who still fights in the trenches for social justice and social action for women, children, and youth.

Working together with newly engaged members, young ladies in college, young mothers, retired or seasoned members in the United Methodist Women organization, one's dedication to social justice can be seen in their monthly social action campaigns. These social action campaigns address the biblical basis for United Methodist Women's engagement in social action and include four social action campaigns for each quadrennium connected to the four priority issues, which direct individuals to more resources and inspire ideas for action.

The United Methodist Women's success is research, planning, and collaborating with others to ensure the purpose always aligns with the vision and mission of the organization. There is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to United Methodist Women to do the work of mission and work for justice through compassionate service and advocacy to change unfair policies and systems. It started with eight dedicated women over 150 years ago, and now with close to a million women fighting for justice around the world, United Methodist Women is still the beacon of light when searching for hope for those in need. Ever-changing with times and current issues, knowing its many gifts will serve the will of God.

Conclusion

Living out the vision and mission of United Methodist Women for the 150th reminds one of what Coretta Scott King said: “The greatness of a community is most accurately measured by the compassionate action of its members.”¹⁶ UMW use passion and unconditional love for others to ensure the least, the lost, and forgotten are cared for in a multitude of ways, giving them faith, hope, and love for their souls. They use the richness of the ways women of all backgrounds—including age, race, education, and economic status—use the gifts, talents, and God-given treasure.

From the very beginning, women realized they were created to inspire, motivate, and encourage others mentally, physically, and spiritually to address the social injustice that women, children, and youth endured throughout the centuries. The work done through justice and advocacy demonstrates the compassionate DNA that makes up these caring, courageous, loving, remarkable, faithful, and unreasonable girls, young adults, and women called to lead the charge. UMW are women deeply rooted in a spiritual journey living out the purpose of knowing God for themselves along with gaining and equipping each other in leadership skills and traits to collaborate, partner, and network in moving issues about social justice that focuses on those less fortunate, those in need, and the ones not at the table. They stood on a solid foundation rooted in bold women, making it happen for 150 years. These women assisted in making policy issues and landmark decisions, organized and led marches, protested racial and sex discrimination,

¹⁶ The King Center, “About Mrs. King,” The King Center, <https://thekingcenter.org/about-mrs-king/About>.

participated in letter-writing campaigns, and fought for educational opportunities for all as well as protection for the vulnerable and those living on the margins.

Valuing individuals as children of God, UMW seek ways of engagement, promotion, and education skills in the area, giving a loud voice for the dedicated 800,000 women who daily find ways to impact society. One of the most influential and brave women with a strong backbone Sojourner Truth shared, “If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.”¹⁷

As United Methodist Women, our legacy to bring issues to the forefront demonstrates the blueprint and road map to seeking and demanding social justice through the actions of women volunteering their gifts, talents, treasures, and skills by collaboration, partnership, and networking. United Methodist Women’s history reflects daily giving to make the world a place of hope and uplifting the lives always for the commitment to serving others. The unconditional love for women, children, and youth displays an everyday fighting spirit. Living out the purpose of United Methodist Women was a calling since 1869 where they started. Over these years, the pulse grew stronger with every opportunity to serve.

As a member since 1987 from St. James UMC, it is a daily journey of turning faith, hope, and love into action on behalf of women, children, and youth around the world. The creative, supportive fellowship is an example used to ensure its mission and vision carry all facets of the organization. UMW strive for excellence hoping the ones we

¹⁷ Sojourner Truth, “Sojourner Truth,” SojournerTruth.com, <https://www.sojournertruth.com/>.

encounter know our sincere hope and love for them is genuine coming from a caring heart best explained by Martin Luther King, Jr. who stated that “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Martin Luther King Jr., “The King Philosophy: Triple Evils,” The King Center, <https://thekingcenter.org/king-philosophy/>.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Utilizing the concept of the beloved community, Martin Luther King, Jr. provided a social justice foundation and plan of action that gives hope in preparing individuals to step out of their comfort zones in looking beyond the possibilities of hope and change for the needy, the poor, and forgotten. This chapter examines the foundation of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concept of the beloved community with its ways of gathering people from all walks of life in providing uplift, inspiration, and encouragement for those willing to be tree shakers and difference makers in the land where hope seemingly vanished. This chapter also explores Womanist Theology, which provides an infusion of courageous and bold women willing to fight through the struggle to make a difference in the lives of women who were neglected and left out of opportunities to serve God's children. Emile M. Townes taught that Womanist Theology will support the work of empowerment of women of color. The United Methodist Church explains:

However, the greatest work is what we must do with ourselves and in our relationship with God. The gifts of reconciliation are truly in evidence here. God's covenant, which is an ever present and sustaining one. There are times when we will "know" this in ways that are too profound for words or human reason. It is in these times that our partnership with God will be unquestionable and our journey on the path God sets is clear. These may be fleeting times, but as well allow God to work in us, they do come as blessing and as gift.¹

¹ Katie G. Cannon, Emilie Maureen Townes, and Angela D. Sims, *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 49.

Seeing the image of God in life and daily work is a testament of one's relationship that embodies a rich history of being one of God's daughters in making a difference in one's community. Martin Luther King, Jr. shares that

Beyond this, I am in the Birmingham jail because injustice is here. Just as the 8th century prophets left their little villages and carried their "thus said the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their hometowns. And just as the apostle Paul left his little village of Taurus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to practically every hamlet and city of the Graeco-Roman world, I too am compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my particular hometown. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call aid.²

Often, people wait for others to make a difference in individuals' lives who need help. Working collaboratively will allow a partnership to form in the hope of bringing about justice for the wrong that took place. The diverse types of action plans give individuals various options to find their passions for changes in social justice that will impact the lives of those affected by the systemic racism plaguing this country. Such persons will establish the necessary tools and resources to empower individuals to withstand the barriers that will stand in front of them, blocking access that should be made available to all. The support gained from the partnerships, collaboration, and networking opportunities will provide a deeper understanding for those individuals willing to work for the cause of fighting injustice. We will follow the words that lead and inspire all of us to move forward:

Choose love instead of hate. Seek to win friendship and understanding. Seek to defeat injustice and not persons. Believe that the universe is on the side of justice. Practice nonviolence, the way of life for courageous persons. Please focus on the positives around you and express them to others every day. Find individuals or groups that help improve your neighborhood or Community and support them with your time, talent, or treasure. Participate in Community service. Join others in your neighborhood or Community to clean-up a street, shared space, or help the

² Martin Luther King Jr., *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James Melvin Washington (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2006), 290.

disadvantaged with their yard. Encourage your place of worship, organization, or club to support families of incarcerated individuals. Meet and talk to your neighbors often – especially the elderly. Help keep our environment clean. Do not litter & pick up debris when you see it. Visit someone near you who is sick and homebound to make sure they feel connected to what they need. Educate yourself about the history of the movements that have given you freedom. Take someone to the Civil Rights Museum who has never been. Talk to someone who has more memory than you do. Promote the ideal of We Are The Beloved Community to everyone.³

Using the Beloved Community of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision allows numerous opportunities for individuals to enter the Social Justice Movement through various means. This results in lending one's life for justice for those often forgotten due to poverty, homelessness, domestic violence, economic injustice, lack of education opportunities, lack of resources, racial injustice, and those hidden elements. Rufus Burrow Jr. shares in *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theology of Resistance* the meaning behind the Beloved Community. According to Burrow,

This ideal dates back to the time of Jesus. Social gospel leader Walter Rauschenbusch argued that the Kingdom ideal was 'the last social ideal of Christendom' and that it was at the center of Jesus's teaching. King credited Rauschenbusch with providing him with a sound theological foundation for his strong passion to eradicate the social ills that adversely affected black person.⁴

This foundation fully embraces the how and why regarding the establishment of the Beloved Community. One's willingness to explore the past, present, and future for an inclusive society will result in a community wherein persons value and treat that one with dignity.

³ We Are the Beloved Community, "You Can Page," We Are the Beloved Community, <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

⁴ Rufus Burrow Jr., *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theology of Resistance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2015), 134.

Main Body

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. informed others of the importance of the Beloved Community's mission and purpose. One website, in answering the query "What Everyone Can Do Every Day to Make the Beloved Community Real," quotes Dr. King as stating "Everybody can be great because everybody can serve... You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love, and you can be that servant."⁵ Looking deeply into why it is so important to live out the ways of making the Beloved Community real helps persons to understand the connection of God's assignment for persons on this earth. In reading, Christians must stay ready for Christ's return by living obediently to obtain the promised reward. How do Christians learn to engage with members and the community as a whole? Weber shares a perfect example of what Christians would do and how they should look on this Christian journey. He writes that

Every Christian is entrusted with some responsibility for the kingdom. Some will take this seriously and invest their lives wisely, and others will squander this responsibility. The part of the kingdom entrusted to each of us is precious to the Lord. He is hurt by the mishandling of a lifetime of opportunity, but he rejoices over a life well spent. He has placed in our hands what is his own. This is a sobering thought—to be stewards of kingdom resources.⁶

The Beloved Community provides numerous opportunities to live out Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s mission of making hope and help a reality for the least, the lost, and forgotten. Howard Thurman shares in *Jesus and the Disinherited* that

All underprivileged people have to deal with this kind of enemy. There are always those who seem to be willing to put their special knowledge at the disposal of the dominant group to facilitate the tightening of the chains. They are given position, often prominence, and above all, a guarantee of economic security and status. To

⁵ We Are the Beloved Community, "You Can Page," <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

⁶ Stuart Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, vol. 1, *Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000), Logos Bible Software.

love such people requires the uprooting of the bitterness of betrayal, the heartiest poison that grows in the human spirit.⁷

People often walk past the underprivileged without regard for their lives without a second thought. One must use the Beloved Community framework in one's day-to-day life, allowing that person to bring everyday opportunity to the realization. The first recommendation speaks of love over hate. A deeply rooted divide in this country over race caused centuries-long injustice that holds this country back. Learning to love others as Jesus loves all can remove the bitterness and envy that lives in the heart of individuals that block, destroy, and crush pathways of hope and happiness for those in need. Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. shares the following:

Our aim must never be defeated or humiliated the white man but to win his friendship an understanding. We must come to see that the end we seek in a society at peace with itself, a society that will live with its consequences. That will be a day not of the white man, nor of the black man. That will be the day of man as man. I know you are asking today, how long will it take? I come to say to you this afternoon however difficult the moment, however frustrating the hour it will not be long, because truth pressed to the earth will rise again. How long? Not long, because no lie can live forever. how long? Not long, because you still reap what you sow. How long? Not long. Because the arm of the moral universe is long but is bends towards justice. How long? Not long, 'cause mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord, trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on.⁸

The Beloved Community shows that the universe is on the side of justice. Therefore, persons must live into that hope with the realization that working together empowers persons to become stronger and wiser to fight the wrongs against God's people. To start on this pathway of justice, one must understand that to obtain a servant's heart, digging

⁷ Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996), 84.

⁸ King, *A Testament of Hope*, 230.

deeper into the meaning of racism is essential. *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Image of God* by Richard Wayne Wills, Sr. explains that

Racism was not always blatant and overt; at times it could be subtle and non-confrontational. Racial segregation was simply another way of systemically structuring and rationalizing the imbalance of power. As Fairclough points out, “More and more, King saw racism as an instrument of class privilege, a means of dividing the working class by giving whites marginal economic advantages and encouraging their psychological pretension to superiority.”⁹

In America’s current climate, this statement still rings true regarding how the privileged thinks and feels about the underprivileged and people of color they deem unequal. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Beloved Community show another straightforward way of making this real by “Educating yourself about the history of the movements that have given you freedom. Take someone to the Civil Rights Museum who has never been. Talk to someone who has more memory than you do.”¹⁰ One must not sit back and wait for others to provide this opportunity to gain valuable knowledge. Individuals can start by using the current technology available to gain greater insight into history to know that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood to provide insight into why people must understand what makes people of color gifts from God.

Growing up, our parents always taught us that we are a proud people and never should disown our people or race. Witnessing racism up close and personal is something that stays with you forever. Teaching individuals at an early age and raising them to believe that the White race is superior allows their minds to grow up to believe they are superior and better. For years, the current educational system taught that Christopher

⁹ Richard W. Wills, *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Image of God* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009), 168.

¹⁰ We Are the Beloved Community, “You Can Page,” <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

Columbus discovered America, which persons found to be an example of White privilege as it attempted to make this race superior. Persons share that education is the key to freedom, so if you are taught that you are second-class, you will believe it until one learns differently.

The Beloved Community Movement's everyday focus allows individuals, families, communities, and society to develop a plan of action to tackle the injustice that wove a tight fabric of lies and deception in the world. Working together to walk the path of social justice leads to seeking ways to understand why bitterness and empathy for others exist. To understand how Black people dealt with these issues, one needs a reminder that waiting for a remedy leads to heaviness on the body, mind, and soul. When one is constantly in fear of one's life or livelihood, one cannot accomplish all that life offers.

While a freshman at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, part of freshman orientation included expressing the importance of civil rights and social justice. Also, freshmen learned the significance of February first, known for the story of the Greensboro Four, which was the name given for the four freshmen who started the Woolworth's Counter sit-in. One observes Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s nonviolent philosophy in these students. In fact,

Blair, Richmond, McCain, and McNeil planned their protest carefully and enlisted the help of a local white businessman, Ralph Johns, to put their plan into action. On February 1, 1960, the four students sat down at the Woolworth's lunch counter in downtown Greensboro, where the official policy was to refuse service to anyone but whites. Denied service, the four young men, refused to give up their seats. Police arrived on the scene but were unable to act due to the lack of provocation. By that time, Johns had already alerted the local media, who had arrived in full force to cover television events. The Greensboro Four stayed put

until the store closed, then returned the next day with more students from local colleges.¹¹

The foundation for social justice and advocacy was a passion, mind, heart, and soul. Individuals who walk the journey of freedom for others will make a more significant impact on one's life and show others that they are not alone in this sometimes dark and cold world of injustice. Learning a valuable lesson from freshman year fueled a passion for seeking justice for those considered the least, the lost, and the forgotten. To make a difference, one must have a seat at the table or even be invited to share one's thoughts and opinions. The North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University students created a place at the table by setting up a framework for others to follow. *Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Image of God* by Richard Wayne Wills, Sr. shares that

King increasingly realized that power was not voluntarily divested by those who possessed it. In other words, gaining the ability to sit and eat next to whites at a lunch counter did not necessarily create a shift in the structures of power that determined their respective fates. As difficult as it was to desegregate lunch counters, King would discover that the greater struggle existed in the meaningful integration of blacks into places of genuine power. Not simply the occupation of the dining room, but also a presence in executive boardrooms and classrooms of higher education was needed. The places of power that were primarily defined by closed doors and glass ceilings, insofar as blacks were concerned, were in need of becoming places of shared opportunities for social advancement.¹²

One can only be inspired and uplifted by engaging in the different ways in making a daily interaction to bring about change. Another suggestion is to “practice nonviolence, the way of life for courageous persons.”¹³ Following the steps set forth by the Beloved Community requires an understanding and study of the identity of followers of the

¹¹ History, “Greensboro Sit-In – Facts, Date, and Definition,” History, last updated July 21, 2020, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/the-greensboro-sit-in>.

¹² Wills, *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Image of God*, 175.

¹³ We Are the Beloved Community, “You Can Page,” <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

Beloved Community. Persons of color must understand their roles and responsibilities of being informed and gaining the necessary knowledge to start shifting from receiving information to knowing for themselves. Wills adds that

In part, the challenge, then, was to inform those in need of empowerment of the ways in which they could empower themselves. King clearly understood that those who needed advocacy the most were also those who were least informed on the dynamics that were at work in the world around them, and more important, of how those dynamics affected them. In personal interviews done to assist with the organizing of the Poor People's Campaign, King realized that the lack of information and misinformation had a profound impact on the extent to which the poor were able to make informed decisions about their future. In those instances where the facts were available, the doors of opportunity were close.¹⁴

Image of God

Regarding the image of God from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s perspective, Wills writes

While recognizing humanity's propensity to produce and perpetuate social conflict, King also acknowledged the extent to which human beings could realize community as a result of having been created in God's image. As such King's commitment to beloved community was seen as being vested in a reality that, at bottom, spoke to humanity's common ground. This worldview, regarding beloved community informed every dimension of King's social and theological reflection."¹⁵

Embracing King's thoughts regarding the image of God allows persons to know that they are all God's children uniquely made with different gifts and talents to serve others. God-given differences enable persons to seek relationships with others that are like-minded, all while building a foundation for one's journey to encompass one's assignment given by God. Moving deeper into the works of Martin Luther King, Jr, leads persons to

¹⁴ Wills, *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Image of God*, 168.

¹⁵ Wills, *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Image of God*, 140.

explore some of the reasons persons must always know their history in making wise decision. Exploring three different areas of theology is necessary but this chapter will ultimately embrace the work around Womanist Theology.

Feminist Theology dealt with women's issues but failed to go far enough in dealing with issues regarding women of color. However, in *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, James H. Cone writes that "An authentic Black theology makes sense of the Black experience; recognize the religious character of the Black community; relates the biblical experience to the Black experience; reveals God in Black culture, and depicts God as actively involved in Black Liberation."¹⁶

Women of color supported and embraced Black Theology for how it worked to uplift and emerge into the Black community. Being a Black woman, Black Theology failed to address African American women's issues. Womanist Theology embraced all Black women for how God made us to be in his image. God embraced and affirmed Black women in the church and life created for each of them. God heard the cries and struggles of Black women's voices and provided the needed encouragement and support to move forward in the world. In *Jesus, Jobs and Justice for African American Women and Religion*, Bettye Collier-Thomas explains that

Womanist Theology emerged out to the Black theology movement. While it affirms the liberation theology of black male theology, it also critiques it. Womanists join with African American men in the struggle against white church dominance, which by extension includes white feminist theologians. However as black feminists, womanist align themselves with white feminist in the struggle against male dominance. Womanists acknowledge their relationship to both black male theologians and white feminist theologians, but they reserve the right to

¹⁶ James H. Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Theology: A Documentary History*, vol. 2, 1980-1992 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 196.

define and name their own experience and to the survival and liberation of black women.¹⁷

Courageous women of color are a part of a sisterhood of women that understand the struggle, disappointment, and lack of support. However, together they are stronger and wiser in their quest to make a significant impact on society by changing lives by enhancing individual lives and surrounding community. Learning from bold and influential women enables Black women to embrace the foremothers that paved the solid foundation to journey through life. God hears their cries of justice and equality for women and allows nothing to be wasted.

Delores William provides a connection through a biblical and theological lens, thereby providing deeper insight into the struggles and sacrifice woman of color made from the beginning. Author Monica A. Coleman shares that

Williams redefines salvation through her reflections on the story of Hagar and how it connects to the surrogacy experiences of African American women. Williams expands the concept of salvation beyond that of liberation. Looking at the Hagar story, she posits that sometimes salvation is just survival. Liberation may not be attainable. Williams also reaches beyond the ideal of liberation by noting that salvation also bespeaks quality of life. That to be whole, healthy, and saved is often less and more than liberation alone. Sometimes it is only survival.¹⁸

When looking to survive the struggles of life one must build relationships with other womanists, to share resources in partnership, networking, and collaboration efforts as God's children. Gleaning from the work God calls us to do, this project seeks a framework of the foundation of the Beloved Community as an uplifting and motivating organization to weave a tapestry of bold, courageous, and faithful women of God whose

¹⁷ Bettye Collier-Thomas, *Jesus, Jobs and Justice: African American Women and Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014), 474.

¹⁸ Monica A. Coleman, "Sacrifice, Surrogacy and Salvation," *Black Theology* 12, no. 3 (November 2014): 202, doi:10.1179/1476994814z.00000000035.

impact will make a shift in the world by being more inclusive and embracing diversity. It lays a foundation for the next generation in their quest to work with God's children who seek help and assistance for a better life. Seeing the image of God in one's daily life will not only encourage individuals but be a testament to embracing God's love for God's children and their commandment to love our neighbors. Exploring the meaning of humankind in references to one's understanding of God purpose in understanding the relation with mind, body and soul is also possible. Delores Williams shares that

Humankind is, then, redeemed through Jesus' ministerial vision of life and not through his death. There is nothing divine in the blood of the cross. God does not intend black women's surrogacy experience. Neither can Christian faith affirm such an idea. Jesus did not come to be a surrogate. Jesus came for life, to show humans a perfect vision of ministerial relation that humans had very little knowledge of. As Christians, black women cannot forget the cross, but neither can they glorify it. To do so is to glorify suffering and to render their exploitation sacred. To do so is to glorify the sin of defilement.¹⁹

Part of the Beloved Community puts the responsibility on individuals who are willing and able with a compassionate heart to care for others and to go above and beyond in ensuring there is a level playing field. Persons witnessed the lack of understanding not because of the information but many people cannot read. St. James UMC has an adult literacy program because of the need to educate a group that only has a less than third-grade reading level for one reason or another. Many people of color will not share that information and will find ways around the situation while not realizing that it will hinder them in the long run. When ensuring a person's dignity, the church takes all precautions to ensure those who need assistance feel accepted and valued.

¹⁹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013, 98.

Human beings thrive better when they connect with other like-minded human beings. They find ways to encourage, inspire, and motivate others along the Beloved Community's journey to make every day a positive experience. Keeping individuals engaged keeps others connected and not feeling alone. *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Justice Change* by Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick

Richardson shares that

People who stay isolated in this posture of fear often use their power and influence to preserve their culture and familiar way of life. In so doing, they consciously or unconsciously discriminate and limit the life choice and opportunities of people from other racial and ethnic backgrounds. This use of power demonstrated in how we vote, where we live, shop, attend church and send our children to school, and whom we choose to hire or recommend for a job. Such decisions are made in an attempt to preserve our way of life and protect the culture that we perceive to be superior.²⁰

When individuals are not informed, persons often share untruths to make an alliance with the stronger and dominant group of individuals. People will share misleading information to lead individuals down the wrong road to gain one's loyalty or to keep the power of persuasion. Often individuals with less education feel inadequate and shy away from events. A generation of people is comfortable staying where they are because it is comfortable, which they observed growing up. Persons must continue to be in the Beloved Community, lifting and guiding them to a better and brighter future. Making the Beloved Community real requires individuals to "Focus on the positives around you and express them to others every day."²¹

²⁰ Brenda Salter McNeil and Rick Richardson, *The Heart of Racial Justice: How Soul Change Leads to Social Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 135.

²¹ We Are the Beloved Community, "You Can Page," <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

Having a road map to help guide each person is a huge relief as every commitment can seem daunting, but each person needs to seek the foundation set by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other leaders in the Beloved Community. These leaders provide an uplifting spirit and fortitude to move forward in being a changemaker. Community leaders are responsible for providing the outlets to get individuals involved in walking with others who live in their communities, such as their neighbors. How do you engage, inspire, and motivate others who felt less valued to believe that they can turn the situation around for good with injustice heaped upon them?

In *The Heart of Racial Justice*, the authors recommend that “Communities that pursue justice and reconciliation proclaim the gospel with more credibility and power. And people that commit to follow Jesus in those communities often have a much more profound and radical conversion, both to God and to the kingdom of God’s justice and love.”²² When one looks for a role model that helps one to weather the storm of injustice, one can look to great women who sacrificed much to provide a sturdy foundation of courage and boldness. Once again, one must know one’s history and facts to see how working together and not in a silo makes women stronger and wiser. One must give credit and honor to the trailblazer who paved the way for those running today in the political arena. In the *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* by Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, she writes:

It appears that Sojourner Truth captivated even unwilling audiences, winning skeptics to the women’s right cause. In 1851, she attended the convention at Akron, Ohio, where she spoke on behalf of all women, despite attempts by White women to prevent her from taking the podium. Frances D. Gage presided over the meeting. She reported how fearful her colleagues were that allowing a former slave and an abolitionist to speak before the hostile audience would ruin the

²² McNeil, *The Heart of Racial Justice*, 146.

cause. Truth prevailed and delivered a heartrending speech that resulted in “long and loud cheers.”²³

Women are often told to be quiet, stand in the background, and not make waves. Since the mid-1800s, strong, bold, courageous, and influential Black women made trouble. One can look to the 2016 vote for the president of the United States of America when over 50% of White women failed to vote in support of the candidate who was a woman with an impeccable resume and forgot women’s rights. Several runoffs proved that African American women voted in record numbers electing new leaders. Now more than ever, women—especially African American women—run for office to make the necessary changes.

Through empowerment, training, and educational opportunities, women learned to lift themselves, dig in their heels, and fiercely advocate for justice. One must not worry as all through history African American women rose to the challenge and moved full steam ahead. Terborg-Penn writes of the importance of education and training to African American women. She writes, “However, some African American women learned the skills and tactics, used radical steps to oppose racism, and then took even more risky tactics to oppose sexism. In so doing, they fought both types of oppression, simultaneously.”²⁴ The Beloved Community seeks a way to be inclusive for all, which includes African American women.

The goal that reads “Seek to win friendship and understanding” provides a phenomenal segue of bringing hopefulness to the brokenhearted and scared African

²³ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), 16.

²⁴ Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920*, 20.

American women.²⁵ This allows for the building of trust that can lead to a relationship that could eventually turn into friendships. The foundation of a relationship becomes established as the result of a deeper understanding that African American women are not the same. Persons should stop lumping all African American women together since they have different DNA in the sense that they differ in background, upbringing, age, household makeup, marital status, parental status, etc. God creates African American women for a special assignment, and they live up to the task with valor. *African*

American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965 states the following:

Remembering the level at which southern Black women struggled and the nature of their involvement, we should not base our inquiries on the assumption that they took a back seat to anyone or settled for second place within the movement. Nor should we assume that holding a title or being a national spokesperson establishes leadership or greater influence within the movement. These were indeed front-line circumstances where all participants were risking the most precious thing they had, their lives. That reality fostered a certain quality in stature and influence.²⁶

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Beloved Community is the perfect example of the meaning of all hands-on deck. To accomplish the goals and mission of one's organization, one must realize that everyone must give one's best effort and contribute with a heart of compassion. African American women cannot settle for others caring for their future if they are unwilling to give their all. My father always shares that one should know one's co-workers from the bottom to the top as everyone's roles are equally important for the company's success. Empowerment of women in the everyday Beloved Community is to engage, inspire, and motivate one to live out one's ability to make a

²⁵ We Are the Beloved Community, "You Can Page," <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

²⁶ Ann D. Gordon, *African American Women and the Vote, 1837-1965* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 181.

drastic change in the lives of those around that person. You must be willing and able to step out of your comfort zone to learn new skills and traits while sharing your God-given talents.

The Beloved Community provides another framework to follow, allowing one to broaden one's ability to engage in the community. One should "Find individuals or groups that are helping improve your neighborhood or community and support them with your time, talent or treasure."²⁷ The opportunity to align with individuals and community organizations that share a compassionate interest gives one the ability to believe that change is possible regarding injustice and those issues affecting communities today.

It would be irresponsible not to share the insight and questionable behavior of Black men during the era of the Montgomery boycott and the formation of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Rufus Burrow shares that

Although there is no question that in general king fought for the dignity of all his people, he was also traditionalist in his thinking about the public and private roles of women in the black community. We know for example, that even in the organization of which he was president, the southern Christian leadership conference, there were numerous significant contribution made by black women. However these women were not allowed to be in leadership positions, nor were their contributions always fully acknowledged.²⁸

Looking at the history of women of color and the lack of acknowledgment of their work in the leading, building, encouraging, and moving the movement forward, one must look at two women who gave without being acknowledged for their ideas and concept. First, this chapter looks at Jo Ann Robinson, who was recognized as having the idea for the

²⁷ We Are the Beloved Community, "You Can Page," <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

²⁸ Rufus Burrow, Lewis V. Baldwin, and Walter George Muelder, *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 129.

Montgomery boycott. She was a leader among the women doing the foundation work to move the movement forward. She gave guidance and insight allowing women to put their names as plaintiffs in the Federal case. Still, she was never really publicly acknowledged by the leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and those working around the Southern Christian leadership conference. To bring a greater awareness to being a courageous woman is Ella Josephine Baker, a woman who stood her ground from a young age in knowing that discrimination against her and her race would not be tolerated. This woman was self-confident in standing for human dignity whether you were male or female or your skin color. She did what was right, and then through reading the chapter on the “Dignity of Being and Sexism” in the book *God and Human Dignity* by Rufus Burrow Jr., it clearly shows the pathway of why women’s theology is so critical and essential if women of color will have any type of self-pride self-determination and the drive to be successful.

As excellent and unique as the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is along with the other men in the struggle for persons of color, one must not overlook the fact that women of color were not at the table when the decisions were made. These women were in the background leading the charge and making the movement happen. So one should not lose sight of the work and the foundation that women of color laid throughout history and why persons must embrace, uplift, and support Womanist Theology. The world is a better place because we are strong, confident, intelligent, and we are made with the sense of how to handle obstacles how to overcome barriers and how to move forward up against the oppressed.

The focus of social justice and its impact on one community and neighborhood gives hope for working collaboratively. To succeed in making any change is to gather individuals living in the community to see the needs and want for better lives. Stepping out of one's comfort zone is a way to experience newfound ways to be in ministry, allowing for God's goodness to flow through you. Doing the same routine often leads one to miss out on a blessing, not allowing for a shift or change. Persons can learn so much from others who mastered this idea of giving and community partnership. The book *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* by Michael Battle states that

Ubuntu gives us the insight that human life is meant to be shared. For Christians, Ubuntu resonates with the imperative of our biblical faith to realize our relationality as God's children. It bids us to contemplate the mystery of person, both as expressed in the triune God and in creation. Ubuntu theology is formed around the fact that there is so much about another person which cannot be known without Community.²⁹

Many opportunities exist to make life better for the least, lost, and forgotten individuals in society. Persons must also look for those they pass every day, not knowing what occurs in their lives. In looking at how the world regards people of color, we must be diligent in finding ways to transform lives. Oftentimes, programs and events designed to help the less fortunate come at the expense of poor Blacks who are helpless. If equality and equal opportunities were the basis for society, Black people would not live below the poverty level nor require assistance. If persons take the opportunity to learn about each other, they will realize they have more in common. This COVID-19 pandemic and social injustice led to different avenues for communicating with each other. Some communities are cut off as they lack the technology, resources, or the capacity to reach the neighbors that constitute their communities. Sometimes, the community will not engage with people

²⁹ Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2009), 28.

seeking help because it feels that people expect a handout. The mission work of the United Methodist Church teaches persons to work with people to understand their needs and not give them what these missionaries think they need.

Allowing people to have their dignity provides another level of God's grace and mercy. St. James UMC would host a clothing giveaway for the community where it allowed everyone to come in and start with joining hands in a circle. Members would intermingle with the individuals coming in for the clothing pantry for opening prayer. Persons would then go to their volunteer stations to help with the individuals coming for help. The area was set up to resemble a department store, making them feel like they shopped versus picking through piles of clothing. Volunteers established trusting relationships, so their conversations became personal, and then they could talk about their faith journeys. This taught that persons must be willing to explore ways to develop and build relationships on different levels. In *Created for Happiness: Understanding Your Life in God* by Cynthia A. Bond Hopson and Sarah Heaner Lancaster share that

Because John Wesley thought of salvation not only as what happens to us when we die, he also saw it as a kind of healing in this life. God's forgiveness of our sin opens the way for us to begin to change and become more as God created us to be. The human problem of misdirected desire is quite serious, and it is deeply rooted in us. It takes time and disciplined cooperation with God to redirect our desires to the kind of pure and thorough love for God and neighbor that God wants us to have.³⁰

In wanting to dig deeper into your compassionate heart, you will see this as one of several opportunities to serve God. One's relationship with God will increase, and one's journey for kingdom building will become second nature as one looks to engage in

³⁰ Cynthia A. Bond Hopson and Sarah Heaner Lancaster, *Created for Happiness: Understanding Your Life in God* (New York, NY: United Methodist Women, 2015), 65.

community service for one's neighbors and community. The Beloved Community listed several additional ways to engage:

Participate in Community service; Join with others in your neighborhood or Community to clean-up a street, common space, or help the disadvantaged with their yard; Encourage your place of worship, organization or club to support families of incarcerated individuals; Help keep our environment clean. Don't litter & pick up debris when you see it; Visit someone near you who is sick and homebound to make sure they feel connected to what they need; Seek to defeat injustice and not persons and Believe that the universe is on the side of justice.³¹

As a person who seeks justice for the least, the lost, and the forgotten, we embrace Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s concepts and ideas in hopes that our work in ministry and missions will have an impact for centuries to come. Taking the first step requires embracing King's thoughts on how love and justice will uplift each other through this journey of healing and happiness. In reading the *Building King's Beloved Community* by Donald M. Chinula, one learns that

King's conception of power grows more involved when he introduces love and justice to the matrix. He states, "Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. Justice at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. 'This introduction of the metaphors of love and justice infuses the discussion of power with the ethical and moral precepts.'"³²

Taking the concept of love and justice as the fuel that will ignite work supporting social justice for the community provides a solid foundation in God's assignment for persons to follow. One way to ensure the idea of love and justice is to seek out the leaders who can provide that opportunity to build trust. St. James UMC resides in the Blue Hills Neighborhood Association boundaries, giving it access to the individuals who live around

³¹ We Are the Beloved Community, "You Can Page," <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

³² Donald M. Chinula, *Building King's Beloved Community: Foundations for Pastoral Care and Counseling with the Oppressed* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 51.

the church. Building a relationship was vital, which was accomplished by meeting with the leadership board and building trust. Once accomplished, this partnership worked together on a joint event to benefit the community.

These partners continue to build their relationship in supporting their community school—Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School—by supporting Teachers and Staff Appreciation Day, Parents Night, Field Day, and First Day of School celebrations. Working side by side with the Blue Hills Neighborhood Association gave the church the advantage of not doing community actions alone. The relationship developed over the years, thereby increasing the opportunities to serve individuals in need. The partnership succeeded to the extent that the partners determined what the needs were and worked to fill them to the best of their abilities.

The major event was a neighborhood cleanup with other partners working for seven weeks cleaning streets and planting beautiful rose bushes to beautify the community. The partners celebrated the end of working together with a community back-to-school supplies fair and bike safety lessons, including helmets with a partnership with the Kansas City Police Department. Each year, persons can see the Beloved Community being lived out with this partnership as the partners continue to give persons hope for the future. Persons must hold and continue to learn from Dr. King's beliefs that Rufus Burrow, Jr. documents in *God and Human Dignity: The Personalism, Theology, and Ethics of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Burrow notes that

King understood the beloved Community to be a thorough going integrated community in which person are international about living in accordance with the meaning of agape love. It is not enough to just bring diverse groups of persons together in a community (including an ecclesial community). The members and Community must intend to be together and to live in those ways that acknowledge and respect the humanity and dignity of every person. What is more, a person

must want to live in this type of Community, and be willing to work cooperatively to achieve, sustain, and enhance it as far as possible.³³

St. James UMC's mission states, "Connecting people to God in Practical Ways." This thought process is in every event planned in partnership or collaboration for the community and is done with love. We will embrace King's thoughts and "Promote the ideology of We Are the Beloved Community to everyone."³⁴

Conclusion

The Beloved Community—the primary teaching of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., regarding the Social Justice Movement—offers St. James UMC a blueprint and pattern of a successful outcomes from community engagement. We will explore the partnership with Volunteers in Mission, Homeless Veterans, Newhouse and Hope House Domestic Violence centers in Kansas City, St. James Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry, and Bettylu Clothes Closet that provides collaboration and networking opportunities based on their level of comfort and compassionate soul. The opportunity to explore the Beloved Community's different influences will allow for gleaning knowledge and power of the struggles and challenges for those who lived with battle scars – seen and unseen. Michael Battle in *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* explains the following:

Ubuntu does not allow us to be isolated in comfortable places to the detriment of others, but pushes us to seek to build bridges to places and people we are ignorant of and estranges from. The beauty of Ubuntu is that it provides the imagination to see how these intractable systems require a transcendent view which is the hard work of faith when faced against what appears to be the natural world. Jesus challenged his contemporaries to have such a view – supernatural imagination – when he said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and

³³ Burrow, *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Theology of Resistance*, 160.

³⁴ We Are the Beloved Community, "You Can Page," <https://www.wearethebelovedcommunity.org/Youcan.html>.

hate your enemy. ‘But I say to you Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’ (Mt. 5:43-44).³⁵

The church will build relationships through engagement opportunities and partnerships while focusing on community connection and mission for uplift and social justice. For the least, the lost, and the forgotten, accomplishments will bring a sense of hope and happiness in providing a sense of rebuilding their self-esteem and dignity. Expanding the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service allows for a broader group of individuals, families, and communities to benefit from the hands-on mission services. The building of programs and services that will be needed will require flexibility and some adjustments due to the current pandemic that may extend beyond 2021. The pandemic of health and racism caused the church to shift its priority and focus on being more intentional in addressing situations. The church will use the available resources to address the immediate needs of the individuals where they serve. The church will expand the opportunity for new individuals to serve in various ways to increase the number of volunteers and the options for all generations to serve. In *Not Safe for Church* by Douglas Powe, Jr. and Jasmine Ross Tucker provide the following reminder:

We must take care to understand that God is not calling us to conquer people; rather, God is Calling us to partner with people in Christ’s transformative mission in the world. Yet, the challenge still lies ahead of us: if congregations are going to do the work that God has called them to, they cannot do it from their pews, pulpits, fellowship halls, Sunday school rooms, computers, and smart devices. Congregations must GO!³⁶

The church looks forward to accomplishing the different tasks and overcoming the obstacles that today’s climate may present, but the church’s commitment to building

³⁵ Battle, *Ubuntu*, 141.

³⁶ F. Douglas Powe Jr. and Jasmine Smothers, *Not Safe for Church: Ten Commandments for Reaching New Generations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 86.

God's kingdom and uplifting the souls of individuals in crisis because of the world's injustice remains the priority. The church will use its many talented and gifted members as well as community partners to meet the task set before it. It will have the ability to adjust where needed and complete tasks, goals and accomplish the mission set forth by the social justice work. The church looks forward to partnering with companies in the surrounding communities and tapping into members' companies who actively engage in a meaningful partnership. The church can glean several supporting reasons shared in

Leading Change in Multiple Contexts by Gill Robinson Hickman. He explains that

Companies 'active involvement in social responsibility through employee-volunteering programs and partnership with nonprofit organizations offers hope for a better society by giving person to person and employee to community contributions of time, expertise, and commitment, there by establishing a personal connection that is something lacking when companies make only monetary contributions (Hickman, 2006, p. 1). These companies create partnerships and provide volunteers for a variety of community purpose, including education, housing, social services, and health awareness and disease prevention. They also provide vital monetary contributions.³⁷

The compassionate heart of those individuals who become part of the Social Justice Ministry will come from a variety of courageous, bold, creative, and faithful members thereby ensuring the least, the lost, and the forgotten are not left out of God's plans for all God's children who are valued, cared for, and loved.

³⁷ Gill Robinson Hickman, *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts: Concepts and Practices in Organizational, Community, Political, Social, and Global Change Settings* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2010), 152.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter will explore different personality and team-building systems organizations and institutions use to mine applications for a church-based program working with women survivors of abuse. What is the purpose of StrengthsFinder? What does the StrengthsFinder measure? Rath writes that “The Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment helps identify the areas where (or team if being used in that context) have the greatest potential for building strength. It measures recurring patterns of thought, feeling, and behavior.”¹ They use the assessment tools and skillsets, which will identify traits and talents needed in applying hands-on ministry toward the Social Justice Movement in uplifting the hopes in the lives of the least, the lost, and the forgotten. The *Recipe for Strength* shares, “Knowledge, skills and practice are also important parts of the strengths equation. Without basic facts in one’s mind and skills at one’s disposal, talent can go untapped. Fortunately, it is also easier to add knowledge and skills to your repertoire.”² When individuals gain a comprehensive understanding of their gifts and talents for the future, the kingdom building renews, refreshes, and reenergizes one’s soul. Individuals’

¹ Tom Rath, “The Clifton StrengthFinders,” Leadership Vision Consulting, <https://www.leadershipvisionconsulting.com/what-is-the-clifton-strengthsfinder/>.

² Tom Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2007), 19.

ability to encourage, inspire, and motivate others is critical in accomplishing a relationship with those in need.

Understanding the volunteer's personality and background will help to determine the correct placement for assignments, locations, and programs. To ensure we are realistic in seeking volunteers, one must avoid pitfalls and distractions. In *Not Safe for Church: Ten Commandments for Reaching New Generations*, Powe explains "When it comes to engaging in mission and social activism, many congregations suffer from what Edwin H. Friedman called 'a failure of nerve.'"³ In light of the failure of nerve that many congregational leaders face, Friedman challenges leaders who are "highly anxious risk-avoiders" and more concerned with people-pleasing and feeling good than with making progress to take risks. These leaders dislike causing ripples or ruffling feathers. Rather, they work hard to keep people happy and comfortable.⁴ When acknowledged, individuals might want to volunteer in the Social Justice Movement not simply to say they participate, but to make a real change and an effort to show a compassionate heart and giving spirit for individuals. This requires a variety of talents and skills. This chapter examines the Hickman's concept of Community Change Context. He writes that

Citizen leadership suggests that social capital is not so much a characteristic of a group or individual as it is an investment in people as members of a community. This investment includes not only developing the moral resources of trust, cooperation, and association but also fostering the social goods and services that permit people to sustain themselves in a community marked by a reasonable degree of well-being.⁵

³ F. Douglas Powe and Jasmine Smothers, *Not Safe for Church: Ten Commandments for Reaching New Generations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 84.

⁴ Powe and Smothers, *Not Safe for Church*, 84.

⁵ Gill Robinson Hickman, *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts: Concepts and Practices in Organizational, Community, Political, Social, and Global Change Settings* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2010), 131.

To ensure we align individuals with the community and partnerships, mission and vision are met through volunteer engagement in the Social Justice Movement. Identifying the different skillsets and talents increased the successful connection for all members, communities, and individuals in need of help. To ensure the community needs are met, we will also engage with the community neighborhood associations to gain more significant insights into their purpose and concepts for the greater society.

Main Body

Better understanding the importance of the foundation for service to others, first requires understanding one's own foundation that constitutes how one progressed through their journey. Craig Miller, in *Teamwork Spiritual Life of the Leaders*, shares that

When John Wesley talked about “going on to perfection,” this is what he was pointing to A Christian lifestyle marked by the fruit of the Spirit. These attributes are not given to us in an instant. We are to grow into the as we mature in faith. These attributes are at the heart of a healthy relationship, the kind of relationship that encourages the believer and congregation alike to grow in that faith in action.⁶

One will mature in the faith walk in knowing what one is passionate about as Christian giving comes from understanding one's gifts and talents given by God. This process can often cause difficulties as people are often unwilling to discover their strengths and weaknesses. Individuals serve God's children that are needy, and the best individuals must be aligned to cross their path as it can be the first opportunity for them to see a Christian in “action.”

⁶ Craig Miller, *Teamworks Tools for Creating Vital Faith Communities Spiritual Life of the Leaders* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Ministries, 2016), 48.

Searching for many ways to build competency to offer the best requires finding resources and trainings built upon the current assets that are already instilled in our make-up. Tom Rath's *StrengthFinders 2.0* explains that

Although people certainly do change over time and our personalities adapt, scientists have discovered that core personality traits are relatively stable throughout adulthood, as are our passions and interest furthermore, more recent research suggests that the roots of our personality might be visible at an even younger age than was initially thought.⁷

As one continues to grow in life, so does the passion in one's heart. If one was involved in the program at a young age through Sunday school, youth programs, or scouting, one would have experienced the opportunity to engage in offering hope and help to those in need. The different interests sometimes follow into adulthood, allowing one to expand how one engages in making a difference in one's life. One must be willing to gain a new perspective on how one's current passion and interest can broaden the use of one's compassionate heart. Organizations, companies, and churches that provide volunteer opportunities need to pair individuals with the correct connection.

When planning to offer their gifts and talents to help in the community, we must be wise and cautious to ensure we do not offend individuals. Clifton also shares that

It is also essential to try to become more conscious of any "blind spots" that are caused by your talents. For example, those of us with strong Command may not realize the damage left in our wake as we are pushing to get things done each day. Or people with dominant Consistency talents might focus so much on keeping the steps uniform that they ignore the overall outcome or goal.⁸

Approaching individuals regarding their talents can be a sensitive area, as feelings can be hurt and relationships destroyed. When seeking talented individuals for volunteering,

⁷ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 18.

⁸ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 24.

there is more than just asking them to participate. Building a relationship with individuals can explain why they failed to engage when it is evident that they would be valuable team members. Several years ago, in speaking with a church member regarding attending a ministry meeting, the member shared a deep hurt felt from a comment regarding the member's daughter, which led to the member failing to engage in that ministry for over thirty years. When the hurt is deep and was not addressed, one must tread lightly to prevent further damage. To better understand why it is essential to gauge a person's strengths, Tom Rath's insights add value when he writes

This is why it's essential not only to discover and develop your strengths as early as possible, but also to help the people around you build on their natural talents. Whether you're helping a good friend realize that they naturally come up with new ideas, supporting a colleague as they look for a better fit for their talents at work, or helping a young person understand that their natural competitiveness could be a lifelong asset instead of a hindrance – these actions will start to change the world around you. Every human being has talents that are just waiting to be uncovered.⁹

When thinking of a person who avoids ministry for thirty years, it makes one realize the possibility of uncovering a passionate component by helping to align them with an organization or ministry using their talents and passion. Realizing the time and energy that goes into volunteering leads to a desire to maximize all individuals' phases with the best possible opportunities.

In *God's Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* by William M Kondrath, the author writes that "I believe that many lay and clergy leaders in congregations and agencies are over-trained on an intellectual level and under-skilled emotionally. Because our reasoning skills are finely honed, we often rely on them to the

⁹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 30.

exclusion or impairment of our affective abilities.”¹⁰ Knowing what Kondrath shares, persons can learn from their past mistakes or mishaps, allowing them to pay closer attention to individuals’ emotional well-being by adding competence to address each individual’s strength. We want to empower individuals by applying their strengths to significantly impact community engagement and address social justice changes. The process of breaking down the different traits from an assessment gives an unbiased outcome, which keeps out personal feelings from influencing the data. After removing the emotional aspect from the equation, it can benefit the individual so that an effective placement can be made.

An individual has an opportunity to gain a new and refreshing assessment of the individual’s gifts and talents. Now that individuals know their strengths, they can develop additional skills or seek training to enhance their abilities to be more effective volunteers. Volunteers having a new thought process in using their gifts and talents enables a better opportunity to get them involved in signing up for different ministries in the church, community, or organizations. Once they completed taking the assessment, they can concentrate on the key strengths as Clifton shares, “remember that the purpose of CliftonStrengths is not to anoint you with strengths – it simply helps you find the area where you have the greatest potential to develop strengths.”¹¹

Examining the thirty-four themes and ideas for action reveals a combination of positive potential accomplishments. Bob Andros created a summary of the thirty-four

¹⁰ William Kondrath, *God’s Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2008), 77.

¹¹ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 31.

“themes” that are adapted from Gallup’s descriptions.¹² The space that follows explores the thirty-four themes and ideas for action that constitute the variety of competency, traits, and skills that individuals will use to determine the area of ministry in which they can excel and provide an effective change in the lives of others. A wide range of attributes from which one can choose exists, such as being driven, decision makers, flexible, value high ethics, detail-oriented, generous, and overcoming obstacles, to name a few skill traits. The list from which women will in completing their assessment is the following: achiever, activator, adaptability, analytical, arranger, belief, command, communication, competition, connectedness, context, deliberative, developer, discipline, empathy, fairness, focus, futuristic, harmony, ideation, inclusiveness, individualization, input, intellection, leaner, maximizer, positivity, relator, responsibility, restorative, self-assurance, significance, and strategic.

One individual’s idea for “action” can be selected, then the training and additional skills can be obtained. The selection list gives individuals more than one option, allowing for areas that perhaps were not considered strengths. Taking a closer look at the options, we will seek justice work, will have individuals seeking to make a difference in others’ lives, to be impactful, and be willing to work with others. In the thirty-two actions, a combination of strengths can support the mission of injustice. Using a compatible strengths system can only increase unlimited possibilities to accomplish many goals and tasks for developing a strong and long-lasting Social Justice Ministry. Developing the necessary training tools and communication skillsets will only increase the knowledge to tackle social justice issues.

¹² Do What You Say, “Rath, *StrengthsFinder*,” Do What You Say, http://www.dowhatyousay.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/StrengthsFinder_Book_Summary.pdf.

In *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts*, Hickman's thoughts on the social movement structure offer a supportive insight that will enhance the additional implementations in sharing:

Movement for social change typically create structure to implement their initiatives effectively as they expand and gain momentum. Social change leaders and participants often form SMO's to provide both structure and resources through the power of an organized group focused on a common goal. These organizations become acting units of the Movement to reach certain constituencies and assemble participants.¹³

The Social Justice Ministry's success requires embracing and acceptance the guidance and resources available to accomplish goals. We will seek to find individuals who have the skills and talents that would add value to dynamic programming so that the "movement" in helping others to succeed can thrive. We will also seek participants who are willing to learn new skills and willing to adapt to the possibility of changing for what is best for the organization and ministry. Using different resources allows individuals to broaden their skills and knowledge as well as help persons in other areas of their lives.

As individuals continue to expand their passion and commitment to ministries, they might realize they grew in other ways. Having the ability to increase the scope of opportunities by witnessing to other individuals in "action" for volunteering can spark others' interests to go deeper into their assignments from God. Some individuals stay in the same focus area throughout their lives. Can they sense comfort and security? As we expand the mission opportunities, we will provide an avenue allowing for renewed energy and refreshing spiritual guidance. Learning one's strength will only widen how one can use God's provided gifts and talents.

¹³ Hickman, *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts*, 211.

Having the ability to turn what some might see as weaknesses for some individuals to strengths provides a new path into leadership opportunities. Being a leader for ministry or in the workplace setting can be stressful and competitive at best. Knowing that one took advantage of gaining knowledge will build one's resume and increase one's ability to expand mission vision beyond what one could imagine. Leadership development for individuals who want to increase their capacity to do more for others is motivating, inspiring, and encouraging. As one increases one's ability to change and affect others' lives, one must be willing to reach back and help someone else with the possibilities to better themselves.

To better understand how a leader can be impactful, one can look to the thoughts of an industry expert on leadership *Developing the Leaders Around You* by John C. Maxwell. He explains that

Great Leaders know the people's desires they lead. As much as potential leaders respect the Knowledge and ability of their leaders, these are secondary matters to them. They don't care how much their leaders know until they know how much their leaders care... about their needs, their dreams, their desires. Once a leader is genuinely interested in the well-being of those around him, the determination and drive of the people in that group are activated in a remarkable way. The starting point of all achievement is drive, determination, and desire.¹⁴

This chapter now looks deeper into how achievement can make a difference by seeking additional ways one's drive, determination, and desires will open new doors of hope and help for those in need. Leaders will look to sow seeds of vital and renewed energy in individuals who lost their passionate hearts for others. Can we only imagine what life will look like if we step out of our comfort zone to extend our time and talent to reach others?

¹⁴ John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You: How to Help Others Reach Their Full Potential* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Business, 1995), 22.

In planning for our United Methodist Women's Day weekend, we hoped to attract new women to participate in the Saturday Mini-Expo regarding the opportunity to be a booth volunteer. The plan was to seek women who were not asked to engage in this process or United Methodist Women members. A personal invitation was extended to ten ladies who gladly accepted the option, and all said that was the first time they received a personal invite. Through the personal invitation process, we established a relationship and built the trust of radical hospitality. Since then, many women have continued to volunteer, and some joined the United Methodist Women's unit. When thinking of the skills needed to host the first meeting of what is called United Methodist Women today by those ten women, one of the "action" items is called "connectedness." *StrengthsFinder* shares that

Things happen for a reason. You are sure of it. You are sure of it because in your soul you know that we are all connected. Yes, we are individuals, responsible for our own judgement and in possession of our own free will; but nonetheless, we are part of something larger. Some may call it the collective unconscious. Others may label it Spirit or life force. But whatever your work of choice, you gain confidence from knowing that we are not isolated from one another or from the earth and the life on it. This feeling of Connectedness implies certain responsibilities.¹⁵

Inviting individuals to engage in the weekend event made them a part of the larger picture and not just their booths. The individuals took responsibility to gain additional "knowledge" regarding their booth material and giving them a new outlook on United Methodist Women. The individuals found a sense of connectedness in being a part of a team while building a strong and bold sense of confidence. Knowing that one can walk in confidence will empower the individual to speak up and out in future ministry opportunities. To gain confidence in today's society for people of color, especially

¹⁵ Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*, 73.

women, enhances their sense of knowing that gaining strengths will build up one self-esteem for a lifetime. Gaining new strengths will benefit the organization. Volunteering with profound transformation will uplift and encourage individuals to be beacons of hope and help to families and the ministry. Understanding what is important to a human being's life, we look upon the basic human needs, feeling appreciated. In *Developing the Leaders Around You*, John Maxwell clearly explains that

People in our society are underencouraged. They desire encouragement desperately but get it infrequently. There are two main reasons why the people in my organization feel very encouraged. First, I have spent time getting to know them and developing relationships with them. I know who they are, where they have come from, who their spouse is, who their children are. I know their gifts and their goals. I really know them. Second, I love them, and I express that love to them on a regular basis. I am not talking about simply praising them for the work they do. There is no substitute for a relational foundation with people. You must have that to build upon if you are going to develop people. Even if you do nothing more than get to know your people and love and accept them, you will have added value to their lives.¹⁶

Building relationships with individuals allows all involved to come out winners.

Understanding that a human being's constitution includes a heart of compassion that includes feelings and emotions. When building a relationship, it starts with the individual's trust, in which one establishes different forms of collaboration for organizations and ministries. One way to get people to trust is to provide a confidentiality moment with the group. Taking a deeper look into feedback from William Kondrath, he shares that

In agreeing to each of the guidelines, people should be asked to make a commitment to each other and not just to the leader. This is most important with regard to confidentiality because people are agreeing not to tell each other's stories. To emphasize this, I always ask group members to look at each person in the group as they verbally assent to the guideline of confidentiality.¹⁷

¹⁶ Maxwell, *Developing the Leaders Around You*, 174.

¹⁷ Kondrath, *God's Tapestry*, 23.

Based on building confidentiality with the team or committee, a new gained level of respect assured a newfound relationship. When individuals empower themselves, using the different gifts and talents God provided them enhances their ability to help boldly empower the Social Justice Movement. Individuals gaining the “knowledge” from capitalizing on their gifts and talents that align with their strengths leads to seeking a deeper understanding of Hickman’s explanation, who writes

Social change requires nonconstituted leadership and practices to address issues in society that have been underrepresented or overlooked by institutions and leaders with formal authority. In the absence of formal authority, social change actors use social capital and social power to initiate movements, form organizations, mobilize resources, and bring about change in public policy, funding, and program. Social Movement relies on collective or collaborative leadership and practices that use the talents and resources of all members.¹⁸

Using one’s talents is vital to having a successful team or committee with whom to work to accomplish the vision, purpose, and goals to meet the least, the lost, and the forgotten. Using the talents of a blended group of compassionate individuals will allow us to access various resources that can bring the collaboration, partnership, and networking opportunities to accomplish goals and tasks in bringing help and hope to those in need. By embracing one’s gifts and talents, one can establish a pattern in providing the necessary values, reassuring one’s strengths, and how they can be used to uplift the ministries and empower everyone involved. Once empowered, individuals will have the enthusiasm needed to share their stories with others who are maybe searching for a place to serve God. Understanding one’s strengths come through one’s DNA and can unlock other passions and visions given to one by God.

¹⁸ Hickman, *Leading Change in Multiple Contexts*, 213.

We will embrace new ways to reach individuals and provide opportunities that before perhaps were of no interest. Learning to be flexible also leaves the door open for the unknown and the hopes of new ways to serve. We can explore and examine a better understanding in letting others experience the chance to share in the joy provided in *Not Safe for Church: Ten Commandments for Reaching New Generations* by F. Douglas Powe, Jr. and Jasmine Rose Smothers. In their book they explain how “Congregations that recognize that the future is now, embrace and encourage innovation. Innovation disorients and disrupts. Innovation also encourages and makes room for new people, new ideas, and new ways of being in community.”¹⁹

Making room for new people is sure to lead to new ideas as we must be willing to grow in our ministry work to change society’s needs. Changes in the world’s Social Justice Movement requires having individuals who strengthen the movement for the greater good for the least, the lost, and the forgotten. There are definite skills and talents needed to withstand the work in the mission field of making a difference for those who need it the most.

Individuals that are willing to step out of faith and seek a new assignment from God with excitement, courage, and boldness will look for attributes and skills to support them along the way. We will embrace our strengths and insight gained through testing, assessments, and comprehensive knowledge base responses. The chance to use a system that will reveal excitement for an individual will empower them to go forth and make a difference in their lives and in communities that are forgotten, in the lives of the poor who feel left out, or in the church where their voices might not be heard. We will

¹⁹ Powe, *Not Safe for Church*, 129.

experience the newest from individuals who could shake things up. We will take the natural talents and infusion, the individual's passion, vision, and abilities to make extraordinary gifts to serve beyond one's capacity.

Study Relates

Using the StrengthsFinder 2.0 and other assessment tools will allow us to pinpoint compassionate heart areas to increase members to volunteer for our epic community-wide event at St. James UMC. Those would include the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service held on the third Monday of January, significant events, and community engagement events around children, families, and veterans regarding social justice. The assessment and survey results will provide the most effective alignment in pairing member volunteers, which match their talents and skillsets in bringing about a more significant increase in the Social Justice Movement at St. James UMC. We will pinpoint areas in which additional training, tools, and skills needed to accomplish the goals, vision, and purpose.

Once individuals know what to align with them, they can go more profoundly to breaking down how the actions relate to each other. We will use the thirty-four themes and ideas for action from the StrengthsFinder for individuals to see to whom they relate. The process is ordered in the following way. First, they will identify the action; then, they will review the theme Sounds Like This: (which gives your ideas). They will then list ideas for the theme "Action" and end with the theme "Working with Others Who Have." Once we have everyone's theme selected, we can build upon making selections for

“empowering” themselves and others through a series of workshops, training, and hands-on practical experiences.

Once everyone completes the assessment, we will start our Social Justice Ministry with individuals ready to start planning actionable movement and ministry work to align their assessment. We will establish a committee team that will focus on the different areas of social justice within the church, community, or society. The Social Justice Ministry team can establish a mission statement from the committee team members, making schedules, and establishing team leaders and a leadership team.

The vision of St. James UMC’s motto of connecting people to God in practical ways guided us. We will uplift individuals to understand better the gifts and talents God gave them and how to use them for the upbuilding of the kingdom of Christ. We will use our love of God and goodness to what is best for the least, the lost, and the forgotten. In celebrating *God’s Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* by William M. Kondrath, he shares the following:

Yet we rejoice that we are created by a God who is love. We all long for mutuality and equality. Until we are able to have these discussions and bring about greater gender quality, we will be hampered in all our attempts to bring about a deepening of spiritual formation in our churches and meaningful social changes in our communities, because half of the people we are (women) and half of the people we wish to serve are seen through dominant male lenses—misunderstood, undervalued, and disappeared. I deeply believe that discussing our differences and similarities, including the role of power in defining who we are and what we are allowed to do, will lead to wonderfully new, exciting, richly resourced faith communities that will attract people who have previously given the church a wide berth. Creating his new community will enable us to engage in effective ministries of justice, compassion, and reconciliation.²⁰

With the focus on the Social Justice Ministry as it aligns with empowering women of color and the United Methodist Church, we seek to renew, refresh, and re-energize a

²⁰ Kondrath, *God’s Tapestry*, 182-183.

movement for hope and help in a transformative manner. We will increase the number of volunteers in our community through collaboration, partnership, and networking, making a difference in the lives of the least, the lost, and the forgotten.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

St. James UMC and United Methodist Women through the years, the vision and mission statement display the urgency of individual's intentional engagement and community involvement surrounding the concern from social justice, women's empowerment, as well as ministry with the poor and the least, the lost, and the forgotten. We engaged women in the life of kingdom building through the empowerment movement while using the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations, along with training and workshop sessions that involved coaching as well as racism and discrimination with gender. These sessions navigated through the empowerment zone focusing on ways of empowerment, mentoring, along with community action, engagement, and leadership opportunities. In completing this project, a model of self-empowerment created an empowerment zone kit that equips and educates women of color in leadership to increase and fulfill the mission of the local church to transform the world.

Being a member of the United Methodist Church and understanding this history for the mission, giving to others is a critical component in what God called us to do. As foreshadowing, bold, and courageous women of color, we must live into our calling from God. We must use our voices to make a significant change to ensure the voices of future

women of color leaders are not only heard but have a seat at the table in making the decisions. In *Womanist Theological Ethics*, Emilie M. Townes shares that

As parish pastors approach the task of a womanist understanding of being an ethicist and a pastoral/prophetic voice in the congregation and the culture, we must work to understand where our gifts and liabilities are in our ministries. This is crucial, for the work of ethics and the demands of both the pastoral and the prophetic voices are significant, if not daunting. Harkening back to spiritual and social liberation can help us realize our limits. In doing so, we may well discover that we have moved beyond our limits, but we also see that we have not yet lived into our limits. The task of living out our call help us uncover the realities and possibilities in our ministries.¹

A woman of color can experience a terrifying world, and one might think being a Christian leader is easy, but it is not for those to failed to experience God's grace and mercy. When God's assignment is to live out God's vision of empowering women of color with bold and courageous skills and competencies, one must walk by faith and not by sight. Seeing first-hand how other role models, such as parents, family, and community leaders, embrace God's love in their experiences only strengthens and guides.

St. James UMC women engaged with motivation, inspiration, and encouragement are positively impacting female lives. For us to be successful in all our effort in empowering women of color and the United Methodist Church, Bruce Epperly in *Prophetic Healing: Howard Thurman's Vision of Contemplative Activism*, reminds us that "Thurman's calling was to see and then bring forth awareness of God in its most unlikely places. That is our calling today, to become God's companions in healing the

¹ Katie G. Cannon, Emilie Maureen Townes, and Angela D. Sims, *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 47-48.

world, so that our prophetic actions will reconcile rather than divide and transform rather than destroy the communities in which we live.”²

The project empowers new disciples for Jesus Christ in sharing a transformative spiritual journey infused with competencies for bolder, courageous, visionary, and compassionate leaders for a better life for all of God’s children. It uses threads laid in biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations to collectively support a tightly woven fabric of information encouraging women to support each other. The transformation will not only be seen at St. James UMC but through the greater Kansas City area and the United Methodist Church.

Methodology

In the next part of this project, we will report on the journal responses of participants. We will explore how self-empowerment changes its meaning by the end of the seven weeks of the learning sessions. The research methods used to assess the hypothesis and evaluate the results were the following: pre- and post-project surveys, focus group review of the outcomes of the empowerment zone, and media outlets using media coverage of Shirley Chisholm and Kamala Harris doing their runs for office for President of the United States of America along with Stacey Abrams’ run for Governor of Georgia. I will also review the journaling conducted over the seven weeks of this project. To safeguard the anonymity of the journals and methods used, the participants received identical journals and pens of the same color so no identifying characteristics could be made. The participants engaged in all ninety-minute sessions over seven weeks.

² Bruce Gordon Epperly, *Prophetic Healing: Howard Thurman’s Vision of Contemplative Activism* (Richmond, IN: Friends United Press, 2020), 39.

Participants reflected upon their experience related to the categories, highlighting common threads and insights.

The pre- and post-project surveys utilized a seven-question survey to our women members who were Volunteers in Mission including the Leadership Team, United Methodist Women Unit, Sunday school class, and other St. James UMC members who were not aligned with these church organizations. A post-survey follow-up included a series of online training classes and workshops, a reading list of inspirational books, and a forum to share their strength, restoration, and resilience strategies. We provided tool kits of resources to equip, motivate, and inspire women to utilize their gifts and talents in building God's kingdom for hope and help. Upon completion of the workshops, an increased number of empowered women of color at St James United Methodist Church will renew, refresh, and re-energize the commitment to serve God among God's daughters who were considered the least, the lost, and the forgotten through partnerships, collaborations, and networking opportunities in the Social Justice Movement.

Journaling

The journals were used to gather feedback from the seven weeks concentrating on the four foundations, media, and empowerment zone presentation. Names were not attached to the journals, only the writing based on group discussions to modify the project based on the findings. Instructions were given to participants that this process is a safe space, and no information was shared outside of the sessions. There was a box to place journals to ensure confidentiality.

The women of color were hand-selected from St. James UMC based on their diverse backgrounds. The selection of women of color included women aged twenty-five to fifty-five years old, college-educated, and currently employed, giving a well-balanced and diverse group. The selected women of color demonstrated that they are better candidates for this project. The participant groups will bring a unique dynamic based on their backgrounds gained over the years and the support one would receive from family to serve in leadership roles in the community or church.

The participants exhibited self-awareness after project implementation. They have the knowledge, ability, and skillset to serve within St. James UMC. This project will allow us to engage, motivate, and inspire women who were looked over, looked through, or failed to reach their fully empowered potential. Women will embrace their self-awareness while identifying the worthy confidence that lives inside of them. These assets show the knowledge and skillsets gained during opportunities to understand the value of womanhood and the remarkable contributions made in society. We will establish a database of geographically dispersed women within the Kansas City Metro area prepared for leadership in the church, workplace, or educational environment and significantly impact their lives, families, communities, and churches. They will set a foundation for valuing women of color along with their gifts and talents while serving God and positively impacting society and the United Methodist Church.

Implementation

Dr. Rudy Rasmus shared the following in a conversation:

We must recognize that God not only made each of us unique, but he had a specific design and plan in making us. God never seeks to wipe out our

differences. However, he calls us to champion our difference, unite our hearts, and then use our individual God-given talents and abilities in collaborative ways to solve problems and create solutions – even to problems we have not yet identified or defined.

We will design an educational system that will motivate and engage church women to embrace the willingness to empower others to understand how significant their role is in bringing hope and help to all women of color. Through this process, we will have a series of training modules that include but are not limited to workshops, webinars, small groups, and online self-training courses. We will introduce the different forms of empowerment, self-assessment, and feedback that will be concluded with an evaluation of the workshop training.

Week one consisted of collecting the pre-surveys that were mailed via registered mail with self-addressed return envelopes. During this week, I completed an overview of the project and hand-delivered the empowerment zone resource toolkits consisting of a book entitled *Learning to Be* by Pastor Juanita Rasmus. The *101-Leadership Series* by John Maxwell, *Communication Matters* by Dr. Shauntae Brown White, a personalized Empowerment Zone t-shirt, the weekly motivational sent by Dr. Bonnye Anthony, personal note cards, and journals used in the process were placed in a scripture-labeled bag and personally delivered to the homes of the participants.

Set Up Session I

Ten minutes - Meet and greet.

Fifteen minutes – Introduction.

Fifteen minutes - Overview of Empowerment Zone.

Being a member of the United Methodist Church and understanding this history for the mission, giving to others is a critical component in what God called us to do. As foreshadowing, bold, and courageous women of color, we must live into our calling from God. We must use our voices to make a significant change to ensure the voices of future women of color and leaders are not only heard but have a seat at the table where the decisions are made. In *Womanist Theological Ethics*, Emilie M. Townes shares that

As parish pastors approach the task of a womanist understanding of being an ethicist and a pastoral/prophetic voice in the congregation and the culture, we must work to understand where our gifts and liabilities are in our ministries. This is crucial, for the work of ethics and the demands of both the pastoral and the prophetic voices are significant, if not daunting. Harkening back to spiritual and social liberation can help us realize our limits. In doing so, we may well discover that we have moved beyond our limits, but we also see that we have not yet lived into our limits. The task of living out our call helps us uncover the realities and possibilities in our ministries.³

When God's assignment is to live out his vision of empowering women of color with bold and courageous skills and competency, one must walk by faith and not by sight. A woman of color can experience a terrifying world, and one might think being a Christian leader is easy, but it is not for those that failed to experience God's his grace and mercy. Seeing first-hand how other role models, such as parents and family, embrace God's love in their experiences only strengthens and guides. This project was conducted via the hybrid method on Zoom and in person at St. James UMC, Kansas City South Campus in Kansas City, Missouri. We explored various options to increase the number of female members involved in the Social Justice Ministry at St. James UMC.

Volunteer engagement and support will significantly increase when women are educated and provided a more credible opportunity through our Social Justice Ministry,

³ Cannon, Townes, and Sims, *Womanist Theological Ethics*, 47-48.

which encompasses fairness for all in church and society. St. James UMC women will engage with motivation, inspiration, and encouragement to positively impact female lives. For us to be successful in all our efforts in empowering women of color and the United Methodist Church, Bruce Epperly in *Prophetic Healing*, Howard Thurman's *Vision of Contemplative Activism*, reminds us that "Thurman's calling was to see and then bring forth awareness of God in its most unlikely places. That is our calling today, to become God's companions in healing the world, so that our prophetic actions will reconcile rather than divide and transform rather than destroy the communities in which we live."⁴

The project provides not only a new ministry for St. James UMC, but it also empowers new disciples for Jesus Christ in sharing a transformative spiritual journey infused with competencies for bolder, courageous, visionary, and compassionate leaders for a better life for all of God's children using the foundations' threads incorporated in the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary chapters to collectively support a tightly woven fabric of information encouraging women to support each other. The transformation will be seen at St. James UMC locally and through the greater Kansas City area and the United Methodist Church.

Five minutes – Break.

Thirty minutes - Group discussion.

Fifteen minutes - Review tool kits of resources outline.

1. *Learning to Be* by Juanita Rasmus

⁴ Epperly, *Prophetic Healing*, 39.

2. John Maxwell *Series 101 Leadership, Relationship, Mentoring*.
3. Motivational Saying
4. T-Shirt - Empowerment Zone
5. Note Cards
6. Journals
7. Communications Matters- by Dr. Shauntae White “I Speak Life.”

Week Two -Survey - Get Survey, Pre-Project Survey

Ten minutes - Welcome.

Forty minutes - Address Empowerment from Biblical Foundation.

Lack of direction could be a place that would stop most people, but God’s assignment requires individuals to be responsible for their spiritual journey with Christ. Morris reminds readers, “That all the nations will come before he makes it clear that Jesus is speaking of the final judgment of the whole race. In the end, each of us must stand before Jesus to give an account of what we have done.”⁵ One’s accountability relies upon one’s own hands. Research and resources will show the many opportunities for being the hands and feet of Jesus. Persons must take ownership and all opportunities to honor the talents and gifts sown into them by following Jesus Christ. When one goes more in-depth to the understanding, the scriptures come to life, and it gives one an everyday opportunity to manage what comes one’s way.

Matthew 25:31-46 guides Christians on how to hold on to God’s unchanging hand and our assignment on this life’s journey of helping others. Keeping one’s eyes on God at

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew: Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), Logos Bible Software.

all times, no matter the situation, assures us that everything we want to accomplish can be achieved, every low valley can be raised, and every doubt can be overcome. Oftentimes, people will say how one lives out the words of the scripture. We must never be ashamed of God and honor God regardless of what others say. Being a strong woman of color requires staying solid in our faithfulness to God and continuing to believe in God's powerful words of knowing God would protect one and all. Sharing scripture with people in a time of need is such a rewarding part of life in unexplainable ways because God's love makes someone else's life better and acceptable.

Five minutes - Break- stretch break.

Forty minutes - Group discussion on how the lesson can be applied.

Fifteen minutes - Summary overview of the lesson and next week's session.

Week Three - Historical of Empowerment for Women

Ten minutes – Welcome.

Forty minutes - Address empowerment from historical foundation, media presentations.

As United Methodist Women, our legacy to bring issues to the forefront demonstrates the blueprint and road map to seeking and demanding social justice through the actions of women volunteering their gifts, talents, treasures, and skills by collaboration, partnership, and networking. United Methodist Women's history offers daily reminders and examples of making the world a place of hope and uplifting the lives permanently for the commitment to serving others. The unconditional love for women, children, and youth displays a familiar fighting spirit. Living out the purpose of United

Methodist Women has been a calling since 1869, where the start took place, and over those years, the pulse grew stronger with every opportunity to be of service.

United Methodist Women's dedication to social justice and racial justice is educational and historical in the groundbreaking assignment for landmark decisions that affected education across the nation. We explored the many ways that the United Methodist Women organization, over the 150-plus years, has contributed to the African American women and uplifting the community. We explored the ability to provide leadership training for all girls, youth, and women, nationally and globally.

Understanding the sacrifices and commitment one must make to ensure gifts and talents given by Jesus Christ provide various capabilities and knowledge with an assurance needed to be a difference-maker for those with no voice. Then one must move over, allowing others a seat at the table for other women of color. One's behavior demonstrates a willingness to offer a helping hand shows their faith connection, hoping that this connection would enable us to make necessary life changes for a more fulfilled life.

Matthew records the following exchange:

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mt. 22:36-40).

Being a member of United Methodist Women since 1987 allows for sharing an abundance of resources and personal life experiences, allowing others to witness that having a solid faith in God will lead to a successful life. We will be all to equip, inspire, motivate, and encourage women that their lives have purpose and value in this world.

Five minutes - Break- stretch break.

Forty minutes - Group discussion on how the lesson can be applied.

Fifteen minutes - Summary overview of the lesson and next week's session.

Week Four Theology of Empowerment for Women

Ten minutes - Welcome.

Forty minutes - Address empowerment from theological foundation.

The opportunity to explore the Beloved Community's different influences will allow for gleaning knowledge and power of the struggles and challenges for those who live with battle scars, seen and unseen. The church will build relationships through their engagement opportunities and partnerships while focusing on community connection and mission for uplifting and social justice. For the least, the lost, and the forgotten, accomplishments will bring a sense of hope and happiness in providing a sense of rebuilding their self-esteem and dignity.

In *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God*, Kelly Brown Douglas states, "Faith recognizes that God acts first, thus inviting human beings into a relationship. It is important to recognize that this invitation comes in the form of God acting in the world to make real the freedom of God, which is love and life."⁶ The compassionate heart of those individuals who become part of the Social Justice Ministry will come from a variety of courageous, bold, creative, and faithful members. Thereby ensuring the least, the lost, and the forgotten are not left out of God's plans for all God's children who are valued, cared for, and loved. We must plan for various obstacles that

⁶ Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2015), 224.

might prevent us from success and keep us from thinking outside the box. We learned that if one is going to accomplish anything, one must be willing to trust in the vision and mission God placed in one's life.

Some basic obstacles can cause one to pause and reflect on whether this is the correct process to accomplish the set goals. We will seek God's wisdom and guidance to identify those volunteers and community opportunities. The Beloved Community framework and suggested tasks allow one to choose what best aligns with the hopes and goals. We will explore the many ways the Ubuntu meaning embodies one's ability to see how God works for others and how one should follow. In *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* by Michael Battle writes that

Ubuntu gives us the insight that human life is meant to be shared. For Christians, Ubuntu resonates with the imperative of our biblical faith to realize our relationality as God's children. It bids us to contemplate the mystery of person, both as expressed in the triune God and in creation. Ubuntu Theology is formed around the fact that there is so much about another person which cannot be known without community.⁷

Five minutes - Break - stretch break.

Forty minutes - Group discussion on how the lesson can be applied.

Fifteen minutes - Summary overview of the lesson and next week's session.

Week Five Interdisciplinary of Empowerment for Women

Ten minutes - Welcome.

Forty minutes - Address empowerment from interdisciplinary foundation.

Believing that discussing our differences and similarities, including the role of power in defining who we are and what we are allowed to do, will lead to wonderfully

⁷ Michael Battle, *Ubuntu: I in You and You in Me* (New York, NY: Seabury Books, 2009), 28.

new, exciting, richly resourced faith communities that will attract people who previously gave the church a wide berth. Creating his new community will enable us to engage in effective justice, compassion, and reconciliation ministries. The Social Justice Ministry's focus is on empowering women of color and the United Methodist Church to renew, refresh, and re-energize a movement for hope and help in a transformative manner. We will increase the number of volunteers in our community through collaboration, partnership, and networking, making a difference in the lives of the least, the lost, and the forgotten. Dr. Rudy Rasmus shares that

We must recognize that God not only made each of us unique, but he had a specific design and plan in making us. God never seeks to wipe out our differences. However, he calls us to champion our difference, unite our hearts and then use our individual God-given talents and abilities in collaborative ways to solve problems and create solutions – even to problems we have not yet identified or defined.⁸

We will celebrate the accomplishments and move forward in empowering women of color, leading to more significant participation in the United Methodist Church.

Five minutes - Break- stretch break.

Forty minutes - Group discussion on how the lesson can be applied.

Fifteen minutes - Summary overview of the lesson and next week's session.

Week Six Empowerment Zone

Five minutes - Welcome and overview.

⁸ Rudy Rasmus, *Love Period: When All Else Fails* (Brentwood, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2014), 19.

Sixty minutes - Empowerment Zone Four Series of fifteen minutes video Zoom broadcast. Journal

Ways of Empowerment: Being Mentored by Arlivia Gamble

Coaching Leadership (StrengthsFinders) - Rev. Lia McIntosh M.Div., MBA ICF

Certified Leadership

Racism and discrimination with Gender Deaconess Garlinda Burton – General Secretary

Five minutes - Break- stretch break.

Fifteen minutes - Group discussion on how the lesson can be applied.

Five minutes - Summary overview of the lesson and next week's session.

*Week Seven Wrap up ** completed survey right then** Post Survey** In-person*

Five minutes - Welcome.

Twenty minutes - Debriefing of wins and gains from the project.

Five minutes - To collect journals.

Twenty minutes - To take post-survey.

Forty minutes - To discuss with the participants of the following steps they would like to develop.

Summary of Learning

We will address things learned, things that surprised, and positive takeaways.

Based on the seven weeks of the program, one will see how the learning sessions supported the hypothesis with successful takeaways and accomplishments including self-empowered women of color and demonstrating the ability to be inspired, motivated, and

to engage in the building of God's kingdom to be of service. The pre-surveys regarding learning and the post-survey outcome showed an increase in knowledge around self-empowerment.

Week One

Learned - table from the survey - support of the hypothesis - supported or negated?

1. How do you define self-empowerment? Defining self-empowerment will allow the women to test how they value themselves.

2. What are some of the tools a person can empower themselves with? These tools will give the women the necessary skillsets to build a stronger foundation of inspiration, motivation, and encouragement.

3. Do you believe self-empowerment has a spiritual component? If so, what is it?

Wanting the women to gain confidence and be motivated to put their faith into action by engaging in community and church leadership at all levels.

4. What are the examples of self-empowerment you have witnessed in your Life?

Showing the women, they have role models from whom they can gather inspiration and strive for excellence.

5. What are the characteristics and traits that someone you believe has self-empowerment demonstrates? This allows women to set a foundation of positive characteristics and traits used to empower women of color.

6. What are the consequences that result from lack of self-empowerment? This will show what will happen if no organizations and agencies have programs to empower women of color to be involved in leadership.

Week Two

In the biblical foundation, we looked at three different areas: learned, surprised and positive takeaways. We looked at *Working Women of the Bible: Timeless Mentors for Modern Women* by Susan M. DiMichele. We took a deeper look at the following chapters on individuals in the Bible: Deborah - addressed a time to lead; Esther - addressed embracing the look; Proverbs 31- addressed having it all; Lydia - addressed your own style; and Priscilla - addressed dealing with equality work.

I learned that Black women share of themselves so that their sisters can grow. We learned of amazing women who not only did extraordinary things but also left a lasting impact on believers for centuries. Walking in the path that God empowered for you and always looking to help others along the way is essential. I learned to balance the leadership ability. Moreover, I learned to embrace the opportunity when given a chance. It is important to serve God at home and work.

I was surprised to know that we do not want to be goats but sheep. Leadership takes time. We demonstrated being a multi-faceted woman. God made us so special in God's message, and especially as women of color, we must know our worth. For me, there is no self-empowerment without a biblical foundation. A positive thought that was shared was the need for Jesus in my space to operate self-empowerment. Other things of note include our accountability to serve, there is a time to lead, find your own style. On a quest of having, in all periods we must surround ourselves with the right crowd of people that can help to shape us and push us to the next level, which is why relationship building is important.

Week Three

We addressed historical empowerment for women, and we looked at a deeper review of the media coverage of three women that are considered legendary in their quest for public office. We reviewed the learned, surprised, positive, and negative coverage of Shirley Chisholm, Kamala Harris, and Stacey Abrams.

Week Three Media Concept Overview

Learned: Covering the 1972 Chisholm Campaign: *Shaping Perceptions and Postponing Progress* by Andrea Diekman; *Cornerstone*, Journal of Undergraduate Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato July 2, 2009.

TheWrap's “‘All In: The Fight for Democracy’ film Review: Stacey Abrams Documentary Is Timely and Terrifying.” Stacey Abrams and other Georgia organizers are part of a long but often overlooked tradition of Black women working for the vote.

Reviewing these articles allowed one to understand better the meaning of staying the course even through rough times. The media used its words to undercover the years of deceitful messages regarding gender and race. The message delivered showed that even though women of color are capable, the media showed that the political arena is for White males. What is impressive to see it did not deter Shirley Chisholm from running for the office of president. It was interesting to learn that other Black women and Black men supported her, but the National Organization for Women (NOW) and Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) did not endorse or support her. She showed a fierce self-empowered characteristic one would need to possess in standing alone when others around share no

support or encouragement even though the media did not share her strengths but instead used words like a minority when drafting their articles to scare the White voter into not supporting or voting for her specific issues.

Learning the coverage and insight from Stacey Abrams' fight for voters' rights was refreshing. For many years, Black women have stood their ground in the fight for the voices of the less, the lost, and the forgotten. Many Black women have been in the struggle, but the name will never be mentioned. They knew that Stacey Abrams took a devastating defeat in the governor's race but did not allow that to define herself. We learn how she took that defeat and developed a voter's rights and registration that led the Democrats to a victory in the White House, turning Georgia from a Republican state to a Democratic state, shaking up the landscape of the political world.

We understand that having self-empowered traits allows individuals to weather storms and keep striving for excellence. The journey was not for Stacey to win but for all of Georgia and the USA to make fair voting rights. She demonstrated a courageous and bold spirit in tackling an area that once defeated her dreams. Taking up the mantle of justice for all in her quest allowed others to see how God and her faith were on display. Understanding this struggle for voters' rights has been in the interest of women's rights groups for centuries. Stacey reminds us that she did not do this work alone.

I was surprised by the ““Game-Changer: Kamala Harris Makes History as Next Vice President,” on November 7, 2020 by Juana Summers. “Majority of Black Americans Value Social Media for Amplifying Lesser-Known Issues,” published on August 5, 2018 and written by Cecilia Lei also surprised me. The nation was surprised at the selection of Kamala Harris as the top runner for the Democratic party, but Black

women held President Joe Biden to his words as golden. She is a game-changer for Black and Brown girls, teens, and women all over the world. We were denied a seat at the table, or our voices drowned out. She realized early on from her mother that she was a Black girl, even though she was an interracial child. Her mother repeatedly told her she had seen a Black girl. Kamala Harris embraced her identity throughout her life by showing her pride in attending a Historical Black University, Howard University, and being a member of the first Black sorority, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., which focuses on women of high scholastics and service to all humankind. She displayed a side with which many were unfamiliar because of how the media portrayed her in their eyes. Learning of her compassionate side is refreshing, and she struggled but did not let that stop her from running for president and being positioned to be vice president giving the world hope coming from her background of immigrant parents.

Social media took the world by surprise, focusing on information shared in seconds of something happening. The use of social media launched the movement of social justice causes, bringing a greater awareness of what took place in the Black community and the lack of justice for people of color. How one can understand the impact is through the hashtags (#) in front of the word. Social media was successful in the Black and Brown communities, allowing them to connect with individuals with like-minded issues. Using the hashtag, many political groups formed hoping to impact the issue around voting and supporting candidates and positive movement. Some might wonder if social media accounts were monitored to ensure that correct information was shared. Surprisingly, some sites were deleted when found to share false information around the Black and Brown communities.

“Ain’t We Women? Assessing the Place of Women of Color in Campaign Training Programs” by Catherine Monk published in Spring 2019. “Voting in 2020: It’s About Exercising Our Most Basic Responsibility as Americans” by Wynne Davis published on November 3, 2020.

When women work together to encourage and uplift through workshops and mentoring programs, one is bound to accomplish their goals. The training program speaks of a sisterhood helping, assisting, and guiding on through the political arena complexities. A willingness to share in a roadmap for those just beginning or the process that allows one to gain new perspectives and avoid the pitfall that led many women to drop out or be defeated. There are many challenges women will face, especially women of color. The training program of this caliber allows women of color to receive the information guidelines around the area that can cause a campaign to go off track or even end one’s run for office. Since women of color are underrepresented in many areas, this information cuts down on many challenges that would make women of color feel not valued or worried they are not qualified. Seeing that women of color recently prepared to run for office at a higher rate, this media source focused on positive ways in running for office, in fundraising, and recruiting because they come into the race far behind. We find hope in offering a support group and many ways to help women of color who desire to use their gifts and talents to impact communities, local political arenas, and changing legislation for all humanity.

Having the right to vote was a long-sought-out road for women of color through understanding that the most basic responsibility as a human being in America is to vote. During the 2020 campaign of voting, many roadblocks hindered individuals across the

United States. Individuals who sought ways of early voting, mail-in ballots, or driving the day of voting to polling places or were willing to stand in long lines as long as their votes were cast, so that their vote would be counted. It was refreshing that individuals had a plan to ensure that their vote made a difference and that their voices were heard. As women of color, we have been on this journey for centuries to ensure that our voice and vote matter to the rules and regulations governed by the political arena. This election allowed families to vote together for the first time, and some polling places celebrated first-time voters because we knew that getting the message out that one has a right to vote, and one voice matters resonated with many Americans in the 2020 election. Recognizing and celebrating how one can cast their ballot is essential. Many roadblocks or negative information were shared about one's vote does not count, but as many witnessed in the 2020 election, every vote made a difference, including the mail-in ballots.

“Brands Failed to Represent Black Women in Ads” published on September 16, 2020 by WARC was a negative reflection. “Race, Gender Dominated Coverage of Harris’ Vice President Announcement, Report Finds,” by Julianne McShane on October 14, 2020. “There was misleading meme featuring five claims about Kamala Harris,” published by Reuters on August 21, 2020.

The media was flooded with negativity in the recent campaign for Kamala Harris running for Vice President of the United States of America and looking at her when she ran for President of the United States of America. The media used words that depicted Kamala Harris negatively, using the former president's words “angry Black woman.” The written media from a few sources failed to focus on Kamala Harris' character,

intelligence, and scholarly background. They focused on words that would incite White America to feel that a woman of color stepped into the second-highest position in the United States. The media embedded negativity in their stories that spawned a dislike for Kamala, using stereotypical negativity in describing African American females. The unnecessary attacks were a despairing and disheartening fact that when Pence and Kaine ran for vice president, only 6% of the media used their race, in Kamala Harris it showed that 61% of the time, they referred to her as a Black female, her racial background was at the forefront of their stories. The disheartening fact was that the mainstream media used terms labeled her by a president who claimed she had characteristics of uncooperative and unlikeable.

History of Empowerment for Women

Learned: United Methodist Women has four Historically Black Colleges that they supported and undergirded for many years: Bennett College, Greensboro, North Carolina; Clark Atlanta in Atlanta, Georgia; Payne College in Augusta, Georgia; and Houston Tillson in Austin, Texas. They were impacted by the reach of United Methodist women, early stage of fighting for equal rights, and Mai Gray establishment of the Charter for Racial Justice. We shared our gifts and talents by bringing up others, teaching others how to serve.

We stand on the shoulders of powerful women. Failures are not failures, just a lesson to do something different next time. Three Black national presidents—Mai Gray from Kansas City, Missouri, Carolyn Johnson from Indiana, and Yvette Richards from Kansas City, Missouri—are members of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated.

Racial for justice set boundaries for the other women to follow, remember to walk in God's victory and gain wisdom and courage.

Week Four Theological of Empowerment for Women

Faith invites you into a relationship was a lesson learned. What are you doing daily to help people? The power in women of color dealing with religious experience, with gifts that God bestowed upon you. Your mission or goal is to use them for the building of God's Kingdom and found through the word of God. I find myself.

Surprised: Beloved Community where we see God individually. Choose things that aligned with your hope and goal. Invite family members to pray the prayer of Jabez daily blessings flowing. Being found daily in the word allows me to act on my conditions as needed. Thank you, holy one finds me daily. Your word delivers me hope and for grace, forgiveness, mercy, love, empowering me.

Positive: Seek the wisdom, seek God more, lift one another and come together come alive showing hope in happiness and God is everywhere every day.

Week Five Interdisciplinary of Empowerment for Women

Learned: Gain new strength. Knowledge is a different time in your life. If you know your strength, then you can build on it. Connecting with like-minded individuals also empowers us to walk in confidence and our own. Every human being has a talent waiting to be uncovered. Time to take our strength and push others forward. Advocate for others and build a community. Develop your strength as early as possible so that the people around you will see the faith in you.

Use your struggles and build upon them. It is okay to say no. Reminder that I am my own advocate and must speak up for myself. Empowered to demand better, demand more, and demand equality. Every human has a talent waiting to be uncovered. One should walk in the plan of God. Knowing your strengths can elevate you to the next level. I know my worth and compassionate heart sets the example.

Week Six Empowerment Zone

“Ways of Empowerment and Being Mentored” presented by Arlivia Gamble via Zoom. We learned that reaching back and pulling others up is important. Education and training will open the doors, but it will not keep you there. See it through. If you start something, finish it. Move from the flaws to rewards, to accomplishments. Sisters support sisters and we will hold up our brothers. School is never out if you want to become a woman of power.

God’s places people in your life to fill the emptiness you did not know you had. Recognize your vulnerability and strength. Say no to protect yourself and forgive yourself. If you want to change your life, you must change something you do daily. Share and gain knowledge empowering yourself and being your own mentor. Prayer is so key in your elevation to the next level. Root for yourself because you are worthy, and God knows what God created. Racism and discrimination with gender presented by Deaconess Garlinda Burton of Nashville, Tennessee, General Secretary for General Commission on Race and Religion of the United Methodist Church.

Do not leave the table until you opened the door for others like you to come in. Have a mentor who looks like you, have them as your mentor but also for someone else.

Know who you are and bring it to the table. Staying in your place is expected. Battling to be at the table for leadership. Black school, Historically Black College based on Christian principles and structures are still racially divided.

Do not let other persons like you have to depend on White folks. It does not have to be the way we have always done it. Remember, you will be judged by others than your ability to be confident. People will evaluate you by everything except your experience. Welcome a new way. Remember your greatness and surround yourself with people that respect you.

“Coaching Leadership” by Rev. Lia McIntosh of Kansas City, Missouri via Video
Presentation - Twenty Minutes

I learned, like muscles, talent and strengths need to be flexed daily to keep their strength. Be the best at what you have inside of you. Use my strengths every day. We will experience those great works when we live and do according to God’s will. Maximize each person’s strength. I was surprised that school is never out if you want to be a woman of power. What will happen when we think about our part and claim it. Talents are naturally received patterns of thoughts. Feelings and behaviors that can be productively applied. Let it go to let it grow positively. Be a replacement, not a substitute. Forgive yourself. More than enough. In power and God’s will never steer you wrong.

Conclusion

In realizing God’s assignment, one’s spirit shouts for joy in reflecting on why this project was so important. In May 2012, the African American supervisor stated that they

did not see Yvette as a leader or role model. She sat at a table full of White men who determined one's value in it. Looking back, I now realize that the Black female serving as manager failed to have the support or encouragement from others in the role of supervisor—sitting at a table alone where decisions were made for others when she was not empowered herself. Finally, understanding what one in one's career prepared one to take the disappointments, setbacks, and defeat as an opportunity to gain a new perspective and understanding. Therefore, it is not until one looks back over all the research, reading, and this project that the purpose and meaning in life: others who experienced some form of disrespect as an African American woman were not in vain.

Asking God for forgiveness in being impatient in forming the plan created for one by living out the scripture Jeremiah 29:11, “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future’” (Jer. 29:11). When the plans allow one to prosper in God's gifts and talents, that brings a sense of relief and joy. In Philippians 4:13, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13) provides the strength from God that allowed one to live boldly and courageously while making space in the room for the other women of color. Fighting battles alone can seem daunting and hills can seem significant to climb without the proper training and encouragement. The ability to represent women of color solo or in a group becomes manageable when one is inspired, motivated, and encouraged to walk in God's gifts and talents.

Some studies show that getting feedback from the project allows one to know the positive and negative gains from the event. Often, individuals who only look at the negative results might believe the event was a failure, so reviewing all materials and data

collected can prove beneficial. In planning a project or an event, more excellent knowledge and understanding comes from reviewing the evaluations. One thing that is important to see regarding any project or event is a practical evaluation. We learn that the focus can determine the purpose of completing an evaluation. Cahalan writes that “There are many ways in which evaluation facilitates learning and collaboration among the project’s stakeholders. The purpose of the evaluation is a statement about its overall intent and function in relations to the evaluation’s subject and audiences.”⁹

We celebrate the wins and gains from the project of empowerment. Learned individuals must be willing to share what they know with others and share new paths made available. When serving on committees, make sure seats are filled with women of color as well. When a decision is made, make sure individuals see it as a win – fulfilling one’s decision. Be willing to speak up for individuals and make sure one’s decision aligns with one’s path set forth. We learn to use individual voices more strongly and boldly. Feeling rewarded in power gained in knowing who individuals are and the power self-empowerment gained. Understanding it might not be time for a particular promotion, but that does not mean failure. Take the feedback to gain new insights. It authenticates who individuals are as essential individuals. The sessions all provided great insight and was eye-opening to the unlimited possibilities. Each session provided a necessary takeaway that will inspire, motivate, and engage women of color to actively build God’s kingdom at the local, district, conference levels of the United Methodist Church and surrounding communities – sharing how powerful words used can explain the power of

⁹ Kathleen A. Cahalan, *Projects That Matter: Successful Planning and Evaluation for Religious Organizations* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2005), 37.

being self-empowered. Expressed value for future works will build from the takeaways that displays a positive foundation supporting the project's overall mission.

The ladies expressed the following statement from their written journaling:

I love to share with others. Realizing that in the empowerment zone is what I choose. Each speaker brought such powerful words of encouragement to uplift, inspire, and empower us even more than we have already been fed. This class pushed me to work in my strength and to stay in my lane. To love where I am at. To be comfortable and knowing that being faithful to God will serve you well. God's will is scary but rewarding. The best-helping hands are at the end of our sleeves. Be your own mentor. Be the best at your things. People who focus on their strengths are three times more likely to have an excellent like and six times more likely to engage in their work. Were to be great things with God on my side. I will walk in his destiny and back. Bring someone up and move into my purpose. Thank you, Jesus, for honoring me with all the precious women you have put in my life to empower me. To do your work, Amen your will God not my will! I truly wish these could have been in-person sessions. I am so eager to see everyone. So, thank you for the experience. I was struggling with being judged by people who do not want me on the job. They did not hide their feelings three years later, still walking past my office not speaking. Learn to be a mentor to myself and self-empowerment, being empowered, so God, please help me in these priorities. Need to say no and then to walk away from things. I have decided to bite the bullet and hire a housekeeper that will free up time and space in my mind. both are important at this time. I will continue to outsource as much as possible in order to be a better-balanced person.

The framework for empowerment proved the concept of knowing one true worth in their skills and ability acquired through the workshops, training, and presentations regarding self-empowerment. This includes empowerment to be creative, empowerment to love yourself and love others, empowerment to walk in God's purpose for one life, empowerment to lead, empowerment to stand, empowerment to build relationships, build businesses, and uplift communities. It also includes empowerment to do magnificent work for the kingdom of God while operating in the power of Jesus Christ! When we know our worth in Christ, we embody the inspiration, motivation, and encouragement needed regarding the positive and uplifting movement in one's hopes and dreams.

The foundation chapters provided the platform needed to support the conclusion for this project. As we follow the biblical commandments from Christ, we hear the voice of Jesus as the sheep did in following how we are to live out our assignments. Through the historical work of an organization of over 150 years making women's issues concern a priority—the United Methodist Women—and upon whose strong shoulders we stand, its mission and purpose continues to be a beacon of light and a direction to follow in ensuring women are a priority thereby ensuring a seat at the table. Through the Womanist Theology's foundational work, the support we find for women of color is inspiring, motivating, and empowering to take our rightful place in the world and society. Through StrengthsFinders, we found an abundance of confidence, a bold assurance that being equipped and trained leads to unlimited possibilities for women in the world today.

When blessings from an individual who attended the empowerment zone were shared, participation changed her life forever. She arrived at church and wanted to share in person. She advised that she applied for a new job and accepted the position, including

a raise and, most notably, a seat at the decision-making table. She shared that the boldness and confidence instilled gave her the abilities and encouragement to step out on faith in her abilities to be successful. She shared that this would not have taken place without participating in this seven-week project. The opportunities that developed since the project's completion continue to grow in celebration and affirm the solution. She is ready to share her gifts and talents and be respected while remembering to make sure there is a seat at the table for other women of color.

During the Mission Council meeting for the Missouri Annual Conference, the Director of Congregational Development approached regarding helping prepare names of candidates of women of color from United Methodist Women leadership for the nominations committee of the Missouri Annual Conference. In sharing the project theme, "A Framework of Empowerment of Women of Color and the United Methodist Church," the project participants are willing to submit their names for the Missouri Annual Conference Committee and leadership positions. All women who participated in the project sent a confirmed yes, sharing happiness at having their names submitted to the nominating committee for the United Methodist Church's Missouri Annual Conference.

I created a motivational speech on "Know Your Worth" based on one piece of feedback from the last session together with the participants revealing a gift of appreciation in the form of a dozen red roses, a spa basket to remind me of self-care, a bottle of red wine to celebrate a successful program, and gift card to my favorite restaurant to ensure a healthy meal. Each woman shared one word to describe the meaning of being empowered. As the ladies shared the following words, hearts filled with joy and tears of appreciation flowed, knowing the assignment was fulfilled through

God's vision and mission: strong, perseverance, self-awareness, overcomer, tenacity, faithful, confident, resilient, change, and caring. Now that they are trained and equipped, the women are ready to lead in ministry at St. James UMC and beyond.

APPENDIX A
CLIFTONSTRENGTHS THEMES

CliftonStrengths® Themes

Achiever® People exceptionally talented in the Achiever theme work hard and possess a great deal of stamina. They take immense satisfaction in being busy and productive.

Activator® People exceptionally talented in the Activator theme can make things happen by turning thoughts into action. They want to do things now, rather than simply talk about them.

Adaptability® People exceptionally talented in the Adaptability theme prefer to go with the flow. They tend to be “now” people who take things as they come and discover the future one day at a time.

Analytical® People exceptionally talented in the Analytical theme search for reasons and causes. They have the ability to think about all of the factors that might affect a situation.

Arranger® People exceptionally talented in the Arranger theme can organize, but they also have a flexibility that complements this ability. They like to determine how all of the pieces and resources can be arranged for maximum productivity.

Belief® People exceptionally talented in the Belief theme have certain core values that are unchanging. Out of these values emerges a defined purpose for their lives.

Command® People exceptionally talented in the Command theme have presence. They can take control of a situation and make decisions.

Communication® People exceptionally talented in the Communication theme generally find it easy to put their thoughts into words. They are good conversationalists and presenters.

Competition® People exceptionally talented in the Competition theme measure their progress against the performance of others. They strive to win first place and revel in contests.

Connectedness® People exceptionally talented in the Connectedness theme have faith in the links among all things. They believe there are few coincidences and that almost every event has meaning.

Consistency® People exceptionally talented in the Consistency theme are keenly aware of the need to treat people the same. They crave stable routines and clear rules and procedures that everyone can follow.

Context® People exceptionally talented in the Context theme enjoy thinking about the past. They understand the present by researching its history.

Deliberative® People exceptionally talented in the Deliberative theme are best described by the serious care they take in making decisions or choices. They anticipate obstacles.

Developer® People exceptionally talented in the Developer theme recognize and cultivate the potential in others. They spot the signs of each small improvement and derive satisfaction from evidence of progress.

Discipline® People exceptionally talented in the Discipline theme enjoy routine and structure. Their world is best described by the order they create.

Empathy® People exceptionally talented in the Empathy theme can sense other people's feelings by imagining themselves in others' lives or situations.

Focus® People exceptionally talented in the Focus theme can take a direction, follow through and make the corrections necessary to stay on track. They prioritize, then act.

Futuristic® People exceptionally talented in the Futuristic theme are inspired by the future and what could be. They energize others with their visions of the future.

Harmony® People exceptionally talented in the Harmony theme look for consensus. They don't enjoy conflict; rather, they seek areas of agreement.

Ideation® People exceptionally talented in the Ideation theme are fascinated by ideas. They are able to find connections between seemingly disparate phenomena.

Includer® People exceptionally talented in the Includer theme accept others. They show awareness of those who feel left out and make an effort to include them.

Individualization® People exceptionally talented in the Individualization theme are intrigued with the unique qualities of each person. They have a gift for figuring out how different people can work together productively.

Input® People exceptionally talented in the Input theme have a need to collect and archive. They may accumulate information, ideas, artifacts or even relationships.

Intellection® People exceptionally talented in the Intellection theme are characterized by their intellectual activity. They are introspective and appreciate intellectual discussions.

Learner® People exceptionally talented in the Learner theme have a great desire to learn and want to continuously improve. The process of learning, rather than the outcome, excites them.

Maximizer® People exceptionally talented in the Maximizer theme focus on strengths as a way to stimulate personal and group excellence. They seek to transform something strong into something superb.

Positivity® People exceptionally talented in the Positivity theme have contagious enthusiasm. They are upbeat and can get others excited about what they are going to do.

Relator® People exceptionally talented in the Relator theme enjoy close relationships with others. They find deep satisfaction in working hard with friends to achieve a goal.

Responsibility® People exceptionally talented in the Responsibility theme take psychological ownership of what they say they will do. They are committed to stable values such as honesty and loyalty.

Restorative™ People exceptionally talented in the Restorative theme are adept at dealing with problems. They are good at figuring out what is wrong and resolving it.

Self-Assurance® People exceptionally talented in the Self-Assurance theme feel confident in their ability to take risks and manage their own lives. They have an inner compass that gives them certainty in their decisions.

Significance® People exceptionally talented in the Significance theme want to make a big impact. They are independent and prioritize projects based on how much influence they will have on their organization or people around them.

Strategic® People exceptionally talented in the Strategic theme create alternative ways to proceed. Faced with any given scenario, they can quickly spot the relevant patterns and issues.

Woo® People exceptionally talented in the Woo theme love the challenge of meeting new people and winning them over. They derive satisfaction from breaking the ice and making a connection with someone.

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APPENDIX B
PROJECT TIMELINE

Project Timeline

Project Calendar/Timeline- All Session is 90 Minutes

Week 1 - Send out pre- Survey questions via email with seven days return deadline.

Set up Session I

10- Minute - Meet and Greeter

15- Introduction

15 Minute - Overview of Empowerment Zone

05 Minute - Break

30 Minute - Group Discussion

15 Minutes- Review Tool Kits of Resources Outline

1. Learning to Be by Juanita Rasmus

2. John Maxwell Series 101 Leadership- Relationship- Mentoring

3. Motivational Saying cards Dr. Bonnye Anthony

4. T-Shirt- Empowerment Zone- Vanessa Smith and Teresa Smith

5. Note Card

6. Journal

7. Communications Matters- by Dr. Shauntae White "I Speak Life."

Week 2 -Survey - Get Survey Pre-project Survey

10 Minute- Welcome

40 minute - Address Empowerment from Biblical Foundation

5-minute break- Stretch Break

40-minute group discussion on how the lesson can be applied

15-minute summary overview of the lesson and Next Week Session

Week 3 Historical of Empowerment for Women

10 Minute- Welcome

40 minute - Address Empowerment from Historical Foundation- Media Presentation

5-minute break- Stretch Break

40-minute group discussion on how the lesson can be applied

15-minute summary overview of the lesson and Next Week Session

Week 4 Theological of Empowerment for Women

10 Minute- Welcome

40 minute - Address Empowerment from Theological Foundation

5-minute break- Stretch Break

40-minute group discussion on how the lesson can be applied

15-minute summary overview of the lesson and Next Week Session

Week 5 Interdisciplinary of Empowerment for Women

10 Minute- Welcome

40 minute - Address Empowerment from Interdisciplinary Foundation

5-minute break- Stretch Break

40-minute group discussion on how the lesson can be applied

15-minute summary overview of the lesson and Next Week Session

Week 6 Empowerment Zone

05 Minute- Welcome and overview

60 minute - Empowerment Zone 4 Series of 15 Minutes video- Zoom broadcast Journal

5-minute break- Stretch Break

15-minute group discussion on how the lesson can be applied

05 -minute summary overview of the lesson and Next Week Session

Ways of Empowerment - Being Mentored by Arlivia Gamble

Coaching Leadership (StrengthFinders)- Rev. Lia McIntosh M.Div., MBA ICF Certified Leadership

Racism and discrimination with Gender Deaconess Garlinda Burton – General Secretary

Week 7 Wrap up ** completed survey right then** Post Survey** In-person

05 Minutes - Welcome

20 Debriefing of Wins and Gains from the project

05 minutes to collect journals

20 minutes to take post-survey

40 minutes to discuss with the participants of the next steps they would like to develop

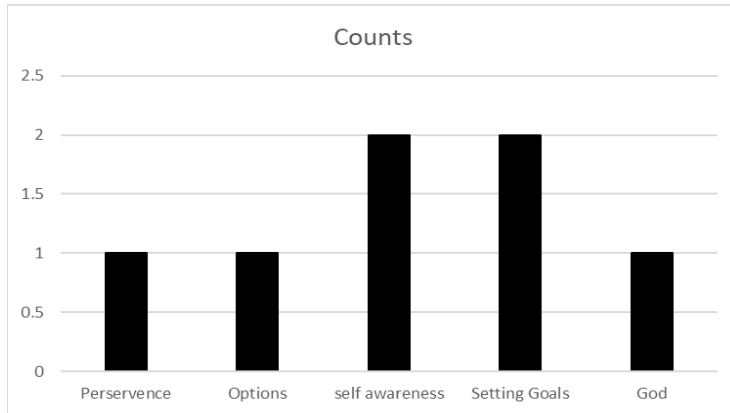
APPENDIX C
PRE- AND POST-SURVEY

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY

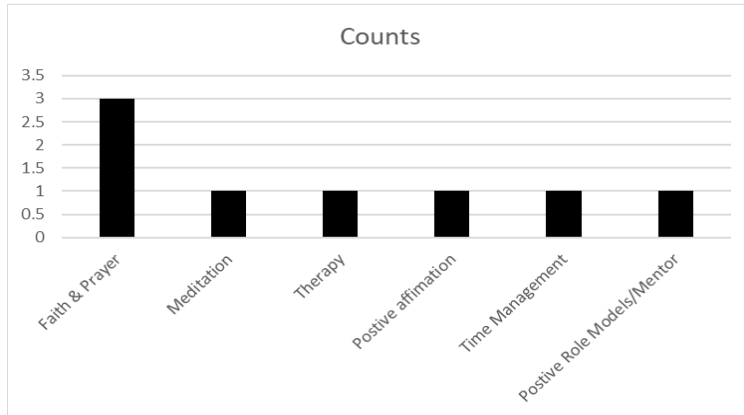
1. How do you define self-empowerment? Defining self-empowerment will allow the women to test how they value themselves.
2. What are some of the tools a person can empower themselves with? These tools will give the women the necessary skill sets to build a stronger foundation of inspiration, motivation, and encouragement.
3. Do you believe in Self-Empowerment has a spiritual component? If so, what is it? Wanting the women to gain confidence and be motivated to put their faith into action by engaging in community and church leadership at all levels.
4. What are the examples of Self-Empowerment you have witnessed in your Life? Showing the women, they have role models from whom they can gather inspiration and strive for excellence.
5. What are the characteristics and traits that someone you believe has Self-Empowerment demonstrates. The allows us to set a foundation of positive characteristics and traits use
6. What are the consequences that result from lack of Self-Empowerment. This will show what will happen if there are no organizations and agencies with programs to empower women of color to be involved in leadership.

Pre-Survey

Question # 1 How do you define self-empowerment?



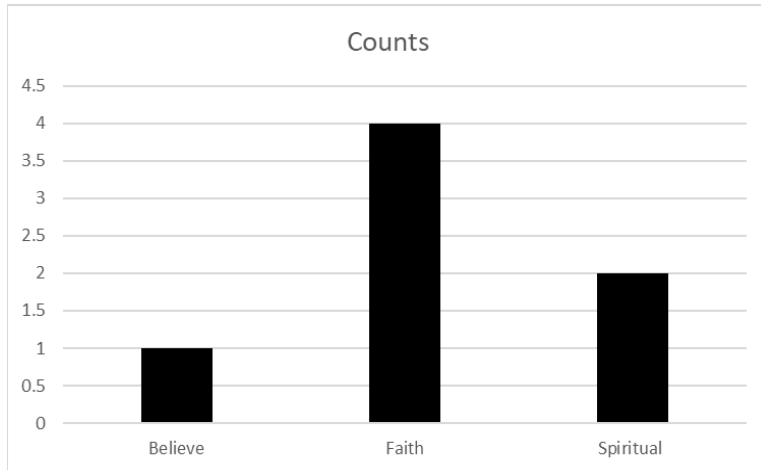
Question #2 What are some of the tools a person can empower themselves with?



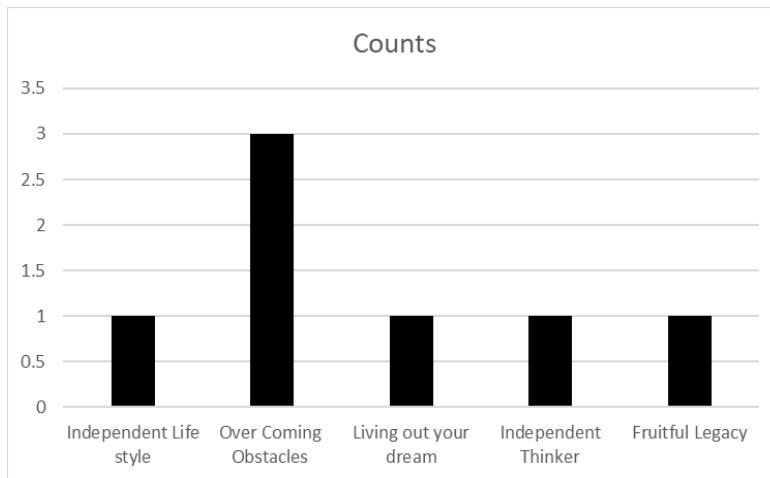
Question # 3 Do you believe in Self-Empowerment has a spiritual component



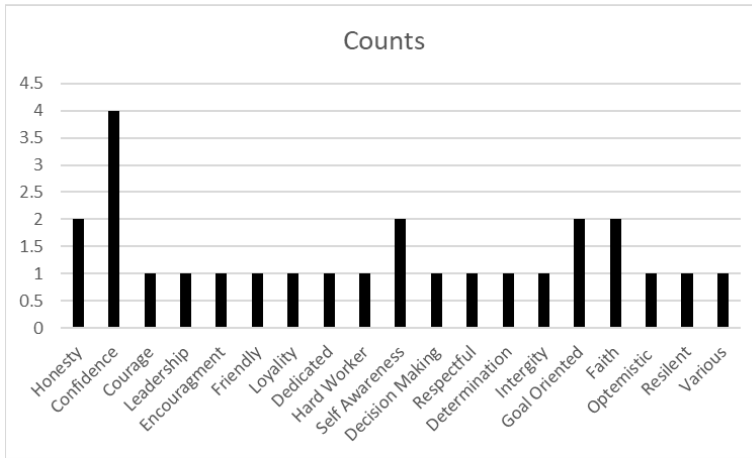
Question # 3 B Do you believe in Self-Empowerment has a spiritual component? If so, what is it?



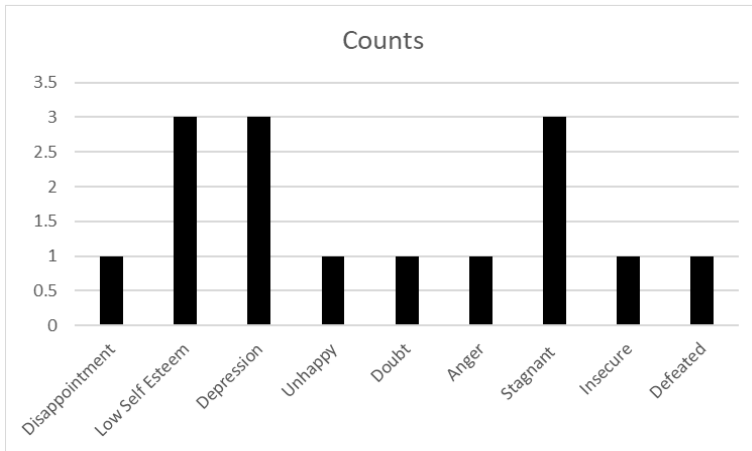
Question # 4 What are the examples of Self-Empowerment you have witnessed in your Life?



Question # 5 What are the characteristics and traits that someone you believe has Self-Empowerment demonstrates?

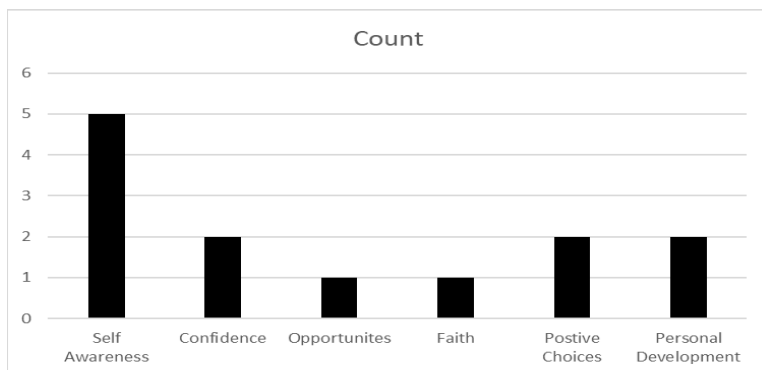


Question # 6 What are the consequences that result from lack of Self-Empowerment?

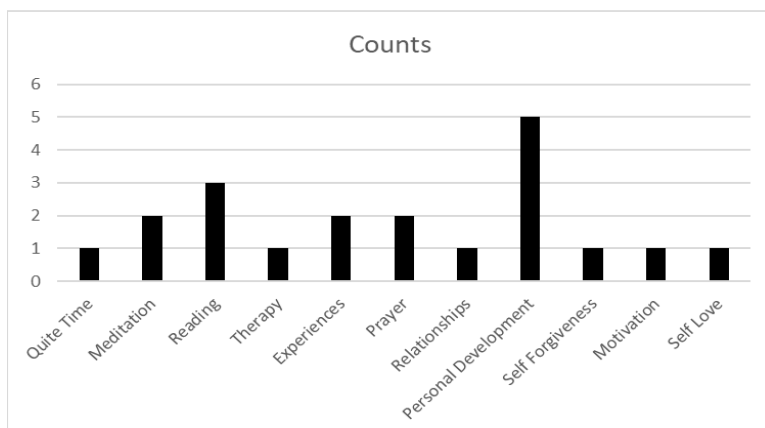


Post Survey

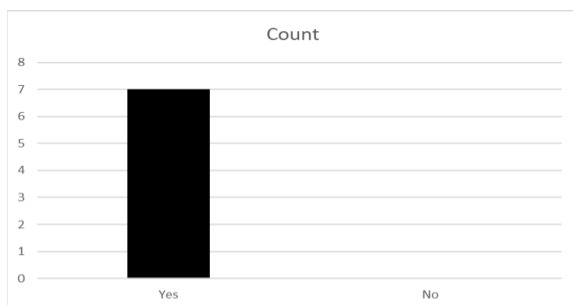
1. Question #1 How do you define self-empowerment? Defining self-empowerment will allow the women to test how they value themselves.



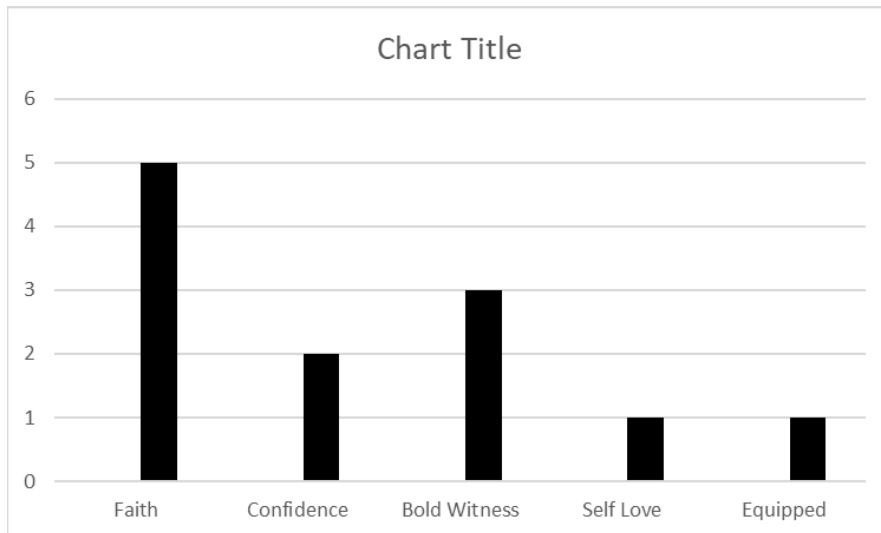
2. Question #2 What are some of the tools a person can empower themselves with?



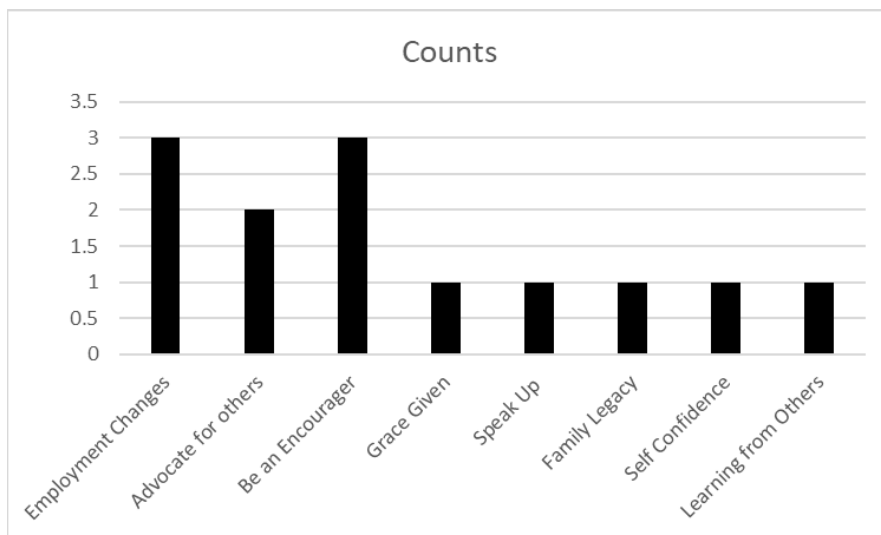
3. Question #3 Do you believe in Self-Empowerment has a spiritual component? These tools will give the women the necessary skill sets to build a stronger foundation of inspiration, motivation, and encouragement.



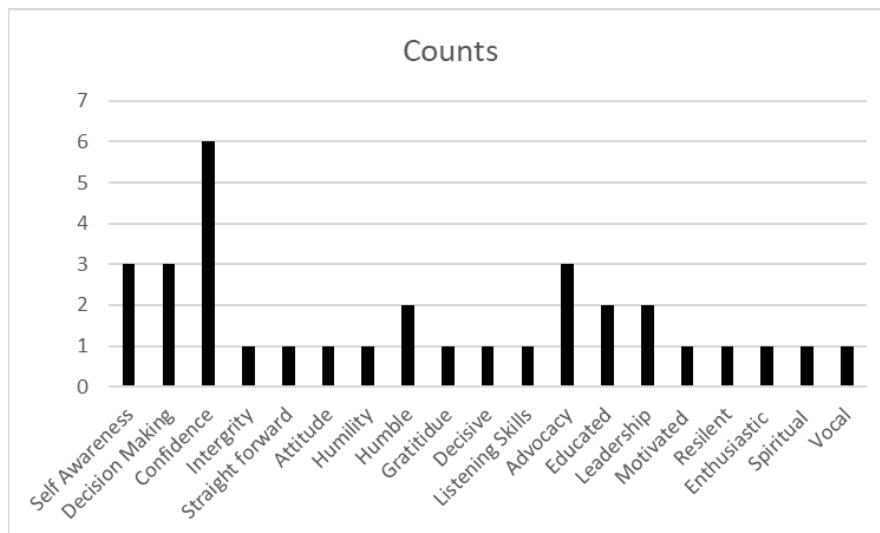
Question # 3B Do you believe in Self-Empowerment has a spiritual component? If so, what is it? Wanting the women to gain confidence and be motivated to put their faith into action by engaging in community and church leadership at all levels.



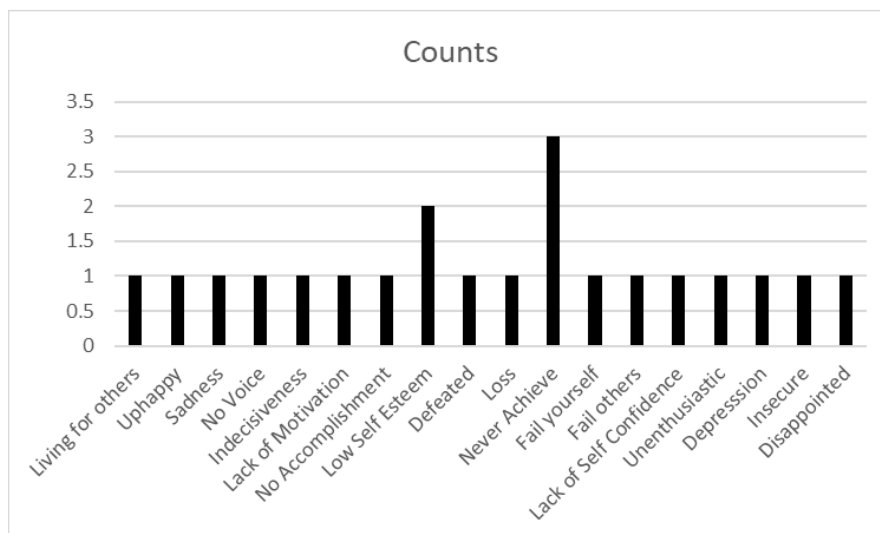
Question # 4 What are the examples of Self-Empowerment you have witnessed in your Life? Showing the women, they have role models from whom they can gather inspiration and strive for excellence.



Question # 5 What are the characteristics and traits that someone you believe has Self-Empowerment demonstrates. The allows us to set a foundation of positive characteristics and traits use



Question # 6 What are the consequences that result from lack of Self-Empowerment. This will show what will happen if there are no organizations and agencies with programs to empower women of color to be involved in leadership.



APPENDIX D
CHARTER FOR RADICAL JUSTICE

Charter for Racial Justice in an Interdependent Global Community

Adopted by the 1980 General Conference of The United Methodist Church

Because we believe:

1. That God is the Creator of all people, and all are God's children in one family;
2. That racism is a rejection of the teachings of Jesus Christ;
3. That racism denies the redemption and reconciliation of Jesus Christ;
4. That racism robs all human beings of their wholeness and is used as a justification for social, economic, environmental and political exploitation;
5. That we must declare before God and before one another that we have sinned against our sister and brothers of other races in thought, in word and in deed;
6. That in our common humanity in creation, all women and men are made in God's image, and all persons are equally valuable in the sight of God;
7. That our strength lies in our racial and cultural diversity and that we must work toward a world in which each person's value is respected and nurtured;
8. That our struggle for justice must be based on new attitudes, new understandings and new relationships, and must be reflected in the laws, policies, structures and practices of both church and state;

We commit ourselves as individuals and as a community to follow Jesus Christ in word and in deed, and to struggle for the rights and the self-determination of every person and group of persons.

Therefore,

as United Methodists in every place across the land, we will unite our efforts within the church to take the following actions:

1. Eliminate all forms of institutional racism in the total ministry of the church, giving special attention to those institutions that we support, beginning with their employment policies, purchasing practices, environmental policies and availability of services and facilities.
2. Create opportunities in local churches to deal honestly with the existing racist attitudes and social distance between members, deepening the Christian commitment to be the church where all racial groups and economic classes come together.
3. Increase efforts to recruit people of all races into the membership of The United Methodist Church and provide leadership development opportunities without discrimination.
4. Establish workshops and seminars in local churches to study, understand and appreciate the historical and cultural contributions of each race to the church and community.

5. Raise local churches' awareness of the continuing needs for equal education, housing, employment, medical care and environmental justice for all members of the community, and to create opportunities to work for these things across racial lines.
6. Work for the development and implementation of national and international policies to protect the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people such as through support of the ratification of United Nations covenants on human rights.
7. Support and participate in the worldwide struggle for liberation in church and community.
8. Facilitate nomination and election processes that include all racial groups by employing a system that prioritizes leadership opportunities of people from communities that are disproportionately impacted by the ongoing legacy of racial injustice, and use measures to align our vision for racial justice with actions that accelerate racial equality.

What is racism?

Racism is the use of power for maintaining privilege and systematic discrimination through institutions and structures of society in order:

- To deny access to education, employment, housing, social services and other rights and benefits of society either by law or by custom.
- To perpetuate, solidify and guarantee the economic, political and social power of one group over other groups.

Racism can be easy to see or hidden, intentional or unintentional. Its impact is measured by its effects, not by personal motivations. Racism combines with other identity issues such as gender, economic status or national origin to multiply its effects.

Where do we find racism?

Racism may be present in many circumstances:

- At the individual level, you may feel fear, rage, distress, blocked.
- At the interpersonal level, you may experience relationships of destructive conflict or exploitation.
- At the institutional level, some groups tend to be barred from certain decision-making positions or levels.
- At the cultural level, one group sets the "norm" for everyone, and the values we pursue reflect a rejection of difference and diversity.

Where does racism come from?

In the 21st century, Christians living in the United States are heirs to the legacy of racism. This is a legacy of racism by the white European majority toward peoples of color within the United States and from other parts of the world. It is a history stemming from the earliest days of the nation to this very moment. For white Americans there is the legacy of white privilege, and for persons of color there is the memory of discrimination and prejudice. Today, the realities of globalization breed

economic insecurity for all and manifest structural racism that thrives by deepening the tensions and competition between communities of color but results in more benefits for the powerful. In a global context, racism is at work everywhere.

The United States—a nation of many peoples of different races, nationalities, languages and cultures—is challenged to make the Charter for Racial Justice a charter for everyone.

The Charter for Racial Justice was created and adopted by the Women's Division (now United Methodist Women) of the United Methodist General Board of Global Ministries in 1978. In 1980 the division successfully recommended adoption of the charter by the whole denomination. General Conference has consecutively readopted it, every eight years since, most recently in 2008. The charter continues United Methodist Women's urgent call for study and action on the principles and goals of its vision.

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